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THE YEARS BETWEEN

ADVENTURES *of* D'ARTAGNAN *and* CYRANO DE BERGERAC

I. THE MYSTERIOUS CAVALIER
II. MARTYR TO THE QUEEN
III. THE SECRET OF THE BASTILLE
IV. THE HEIR OF BUCKINGHAM

THE HEIR OF BUCKINGHAM

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THE HEIR OF BUCKINGHAM

BY

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AND

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TRANSLATED BY

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THE HEIR OF BUCKINGHAM

THE HEIR OF BUCKINGHAM

CHAPTER I

THE CARDINAL'S BLOODHOUNDS

As soon as he was alone, Richelieu rose to his feet. Tricked? Yes! Defeated? No! Once again the Queen had eluded him, thanks to the Cavalier's astounding escape, but the game was by no means lost.

It would, of course, be difficult to prevent the fugitives from crossing the frontier now that so much time had been lost. Yet the power of the great minister was not confined within the frontiers of his own country. He possessed in England agencies which, though concealed, were no less powerful. His recent conversation with Mazarin's beautiful friend had been highly encouraging.

"The Countess of Suttland is now mine. The letter that Monsieur d'Artagnan bears to her brother contains such persuasive arguments that MacLegor will follow her in supporting me. Through him I shall control Cromwell and his Puritans. It must have been ordained by heaven that the children of old Laird MacDiarmid should be in my service. Like father, like son!"

A faint smile lighted the gloomy face.

"Mazarin seemed to be well informed about this young Cavalier. His request that no mention of him be made to

the Countess shows that she either knows him or is interested in him."

The Cardinal seated himself at the table and wrote swiftly these words:

I beg to inform the Countess of Suttland that a prisoner of State has escaped from the Bastille, and in all probability is attempting to reach London. There he expects to find friends in Madame de Chevreuse and Lord Montague. This young man, whose real name and origin are unknown, is about sixteen years old. It is unnecessary for me to tell you that, if his escape is successful, it is of the utmost importance that we make sure of the person of the Mysterious Cavalier.

Richelieu

He read the letter over carefully, sealed it, and rang for a messenger.

"Deliver this as addressed, with all possible speed." The Cardinal continued his reflections.

"Ah, if only I still had my wonderful, loyal servants of the old days—a Rochefort or Milady. The fugitives would not go far with such bloodhounds on their trail!"

The door opened and Chavigny entered:

"Monseigneur, Monsieur d'Artagnan has just returned and is bringing someone with him!"

In confirmation of this, the Musketeer himself appeared, pushing before him a huge but trembling creature all covered with mud and encased in a network of chains.

"Good God, what is that?" asked Richelieu, drawing back as the gigantic form fell at his feet.

"Master Duretête, turnkey at the Bastille!"

"Call in du Tremblay," commanded the Cardinal.

Still unnerved as a result of the infernal apparitions and of his long captivity, the miserable jailer was completely broken. He muttered an incoherent entreaty when he saw his chief enter the room.

"Wretch," cried the Governor, "what have you done with your prisoners? Where are Ningun, Vauselle?"

The prostrate man shuddered.

"The devil!" he moaned, striking his head against the floor.

At this moment Mazarin reappeared. He was accompanied by a gaunt man, whose eyes blinked continually and who staggered as he walked.

"Here, Monseigneur, is Monsieur de Vauselle."

On hearing that abhorred name, Duretête sprang suddenly to his feet. His eyes burned madly as he gasped:

"Vauselle . . . tempter . . . sorcerer . . . demon!"

Like a wild beast he leaped at the throat of the unfortunate newcomer. The impact caused both attacker and attacked to crash to the floor. This amazing struggle continued for several moments. Vauselle gasped for breath; Duretête was foaming at the mouth. But d'Artagnan quickly took a hand in the proceedings. He pressed the iron collar with such force about the neck of the jailer as to compel the madman to relax his hold on the half-fainting spy.

"Peace!" thundered Richelieu, who had witnessed this terrific struggle with the greatest calmness. "Let us have an explanation."

"Yes," panted Vauselle, mopping his face. "Who is this maniac, and what does he want?"

The Cardinal put his question first to du Tremblay. But the Governor could not understand the slightest part of this mystery of which he had been the victim. According to him Vauselle had not left the Bastille, and he could furnish the most detailed evidence to that effect. The spy, in his turn, protested violently, demanding to know what was meant by all this talk of an elixir, and bandages on the head, and other such nonsense. All that he knew was that for eight days he had been subsisting on bread and water in the cellar of *The White Sheep*.

The truth began to dawn upon Richelieu.

"Someone has been substituted for Vauselle!"

"Have I gone blind then?" exclaimed the Governor indignantly. "And what about Mademoiselle Minou, who came twice to the *Basinière?* Was she unable to recognize her own brother? Impossible!"

Mazarin stepped forward, and said softly:

"Mademoiselle Minou? She has not left Rueil for the last eight days."

Du Tremblay was completely crushed.

"I must be mad," he muttered.

Meanwhile the turnkey had not ceased staring at Vauselle.

"They lie, Monseigneur!" he cried suddenly, pointing to his recent victim. "That is not Vauselle!"

"Indeed!" remarked the spy. "Then I too must be mad."

Laffémas was now introduced to push the cross-examination of the jailer. The grim Counsellor informed Duretête that the bag of doubloons had been discovered and that the fair Anastasie, assisted by torture, had spoken freely. There

was no longer any hope for the turnkey and he confessed everything. When he had finished he was seized by a new paroxysm of rage; he foamed at the mouth, biting his lips and clenching his fists savagely.

"Vauselle . . . devil . . . God's curse upon you!"

And then once again the poor wretch trembled violently.

Richelieu no longer listened; this mad scene disgusted him. Drawing his advisers to one side, he said abruptly:

"The mystery is quite simple. Both of these rogues are victims of the same dangerous person who arranged the whole plot."

"Bergerac?"

"Yes, Bergerac! And now, Monsieur d'Artagnan, you understand, do you not, that it is your old enemy who is the *deus ex machina* of the affair and the saviour of the Cavalier?"

"I understand, Monseigneur."

Mazarin, still restless, whispered into his master's ear:

"Not at all," replied Richelieu, in a low voice. "I trust d'Artagnan. He is a man who does not know how to betray, but who does know the value of a sword."

The Italian made a gesture of unwilling assent.

"As far as those two are concerned," continued Richelieu, casting a cold glance at the trembling group, "I have made my decision."

"Shall I prepare the torture?" suggested Laffémas.

"Absurd! You saw the insane hate that Duretête displayed toward that scoundrel Vauselle? He will not feel any less kindly toward the man who really deceived him —the man of the *Basinière* and of *Gentilly*. Ah, if once he can but get his hands on Bergerac's throat! And do you

see the gaunt face of the true Vauselle? He will never forget his experience in the cellar of *The White Sheep.*"

The statesman's mind was made up; he called in a loud voice:

"Come here, knaves!"

The two men realized that the hour of reckoning had come. Both fell to their knees.

"Have pity, Monseigneur!"

"You deserve none!"

Duretête rose half way to his feet.

"True," he gasped. "Let me die. But first, for God's sake, Monseigneur, if the Spaniard and his accomplice are captured, as a favor, give them over to me!"

"What will you do?"

The fierce light burning in the man's eyes was an eloquent answer.

"Very well," said Richelieu. "Let their chains be removed."

Then, cutting short the murmur of protests that arose, he continued:

"These two men are free! Supply them at once with horses, money, and an escort."

Duretête and Vauselle exchanged quick glances; they seemed dazed, unable to believe their own ears. Richelieu rapidly dictated several letters in a low voice. When he had finished, he turned again to the men:

"Listen to me carefully. And this time, on my word, there shall be no nonsense; whether you are traitors or dupes, you can expect no mercy!"

A double protestation of blind devotion answered the menace of this remark.

"You are to take the Calais post-road at once. Here are your passports, your instructions, and an order for the arrest of the Cavalier, if you find him in France."

"And if he succeeds in crossing the frontier?"

"You are to cross also," answered Richelieu, handing Vauselle a letter that he had just sealed. "In that case, open this envelope and follow to the letter the instructions inside."

"Ah, Monseigneur, you are a second father, you have saved my life!" cried Vauselle, clasping the knees of the merciful master. "I, the Sieur de Vauselle, will go to hell itself in your service!"

Duretête, for his part, could say nothing, but his gesture was full of grim significance.

"And I was looking for bloodhounds," murmured the Cardinal as he watched the two men retire. "Where could I have discovered the equal of these? Bear and fox!"

"Monsieur d'Artagnan," he said, approaching the Musketeer, and giving him the famous bag of doubloons that Laffémas had brought with him, "you will accompany these fine fellows. Never let them out of your sight, and assist them when necessary. See to it that they return with the Cavalier. . . ."

"Dead or alive!" completed Chavigny.

"Alive!" corrected Richelieu. "Go!"

"*Alive!*" repeated d'Artagnan, leaving. "That, Monseigneur, I guarantee."

In the court-yard a detachment of guards, already in the saddle, awaited the pleasure of Vauselle and Duretête. Chavigny was arranging the last details of the expedition. D'Artagnan advanced to the centre of the group and ex-

changed several words with the officer in command. The latter was a rough old soldier, but at heart an excellent fellow.

"Lieutenant," growled the officer, looking suspiciously at his future fellow-travellers, "what sort of animals are these?"

"Bah! Merely friends of Monsieur Mazarin—a spy and a turnkey."

The old veteran made a wry face. D'Artagnan mounted quickly, and waving farewell to the officer, said:

"Good-bye for the present. I will go on ahead. You can join me on the post-road."

The Musketeer rode quickly toward the Saint-Denis gate. As he entered the boulevard, he heard the heavy boom of a cannon. Du Tremblay, on returning to his residence, had decided to give a tardy alarm. The gate was at once closed. A long line of carriages and horsemen suddenly found themselves unable to advance. A crowd assembled from every direction in hopes of learning the news. The report soon spread through the city:

"A prisoner had escaped from the Bastille!"

The Musketeer forced his way through the crowd, paying no attention to the irritated protests from those into whom he bumped. Directly in front of the gate a carriage which had been stopped prevented further progress. Through the open carriage window he observed the face of a woman who was talking excitedly to the guard. Seeing the Musketeer, she cried:

"Wait, here is one of his officers. Approach, sir, and tell this obstinate fool that you have seen me in the Cardinal's palace."

D'Artagnan now recognized the impatient traveller. A worried look showed on his face.

"Madame speaks the truth," he said, bowing. "I have, indeed, had the pleasure of meeting her in His Eminence's palace." Then turning to the guard, he added: "But whether or not she is to be allowed to continue on her way is your affair."

The face of the woman changed color. A sudden burst of anger altered the soft lines of her lovely face. The caressing blue eyes burned with suppressed rage, the smile left her lips. D'Artagnan, perfectly calm, bowed again and without waiting passed through the gate. He was now out of Paris.

He pondered for some time this chance meeting with the Cardinal's fair visitor. The woman's sudden departure confirmed his suspicions. The first sight he had of her had given him a strange uncomfortable feeling. He instinctively associated her with the many perils that surrounded the Cavalier. And now as he took his first step on the way to England he met her in furious haste to leave Paris.

"Hmm, His Eminence neglects nothing, and the Countess of Suttland is not a loiterer!"

His surmise was correct. On receiving Richelieu's letter the English beauty had ordered her carriage to be prepared immediately. She started at once for Calais but the unfortunate episode at the gate had caused a temporary delay.

In the meantime the Musketeer hurried forward, anxious to obtain news of the fugitives. He talked to the tavern-keeper at Saint-Denis and learned that a group of four

horsemen had passed in the early hours of the morning. Cyrano's extraordinary figure and *Capitan's* handsome appearance made identification easy. D'Artagnan decided that by this time they must have reached Chantilly; this would place them twelve leagues in advance of their pursuers. Except for some accident, they should reach a safe hiding-place.

Ah, *mordieu*, how the good old days came back to him—when he and his three comrades were galloping toward London! Athos, Aramis, Porthos! The Musketeer was lost in melancholy reverie while his horse trotted steadily along. Each mile of the road awakened in him memories that had long been forgotten. He saw the fair face of Constance Bonacieux, his first love; the solemn, austere figure of Athos; the huge bulk and jovial smile of Porthos; the slender, elegant form of Aramis.

Where were his companions of those old days? He wished that they now could be at his side—Aramis particularly. D'Artagnan amused himself by recalling the features of the soldier-theologian—Aramis, who was always vacillating between two contradictory vocations. Ah, how well did his supple, facile mind reconcile religious scruples with the wildest adventures of a soldier and a lover! What an invaluable aid he would be in this delicate mission which he had undertaken for the Cardinal—and for Anne of Austria!

Yes, *sandi*, there was no denying that he was committed to two separate undertakings which were hard to reconcile. He called to mind Richelieu's explicit instructions: keep an eye on the "bloodhounds," and make sure that the Cavalier returns alive—this was a delicate point that caused him

the greatest anxiety. The orders given were to seize the rebel if he were found on French soil.

It was for this reason that he had hastened to obtain as complete information as possible concerning the fugitives' progress. As if to reassure himself, he said:

"Bergerac is no fool—witness the little trick he played on Mazarin and Vauselle, and the big fellow who rode by his side appeared to be one to command respect. As for the young Cavalier, I know by experience he is no coward. Come, there's no need to worry. We shall not reach the coast before they have found safety on the other side of the Channel."

Safety? The face of the woman whom he had seen with the Cardinal and at the Saint-Denis gate suddenly flashed before him. There could be no question that as soon as Tancrède escaped from France he would have but one thought: to start a search for his family. Alas, in this difficult task the young man could not take one step without finding himself exposed to a host of unknown dangers.

"How can I help him?" mused the Musketeer. "How can I direct him from a distance, and secretly? What do I really know about him? Nothing. Who are MacLegor and Suttland? I feel that they are lurking in the shadows, but that is all. What did the Queen tell me? Scarcely a thing. One name: *Patrick!* And Lord Buckingham's faithful servant has not been seen for sixteen years. What a useful clue! Ah, *mordi de mordi,* once again you are taking dangerous, unknown chances, d'Artagnan. Already you are attempting to steer a course through troubled seas without a compass."

This conclusion he had reached half-way between Ecouen

and Luzarches. Turning in his saddle, he saw a troop of horsemen approaching in a cloud of dust.

"Good," he remarked, suddenly calm. "Here come my friends. It's quite like me to bother about the end of the affair before we have really begun."

A moment later the group was on him. Vauselle galloped far in advance of the others. The ride had excited the spy; his red skin and flashing eyes gave him the appearance of a drunken man. Passing the Musketeer, he cried:

"We have them, Monsieur d'Artagnan! Their passage has been noticed everywhere. We were gaining on them at Ecouen."

The Musketeer smiled rather skeptically. The main body of the cavalcade rushed by him at a furious pace. Twenty riders leaned over their foaming horses; the splendid animals were panting hard, and a significant trembling agitated their sinewy limbs. In the midst of the group d'Artagnan saw Duretête. The turnkey was pale, he gritted his teeth as he tried to keep abreast of his companions. He held fiercely to the reins and dug his heels into the horse's flanks. The old officer brought up the rear. Reaching the Musketeer, he held up his hand and pulled his horse to a stop.

"This Vauselle must be mad," he grumbled. "If we continue at this pace we won't reach Beauvais without leaving most of our horses dead along the road."

"What can we do?" asked d'Artagnan ironically. "We must obey and follow!"

The old fellow swore a loud *morguienne*, and started on again at a gallop. They rejoined the cavalcade at Lu-

zarches. The guards waited for them, holding their panting steeds by the bridle. Vauselle had disappeared in search of news. He soon returned fiercely exultant.

"They have seen them here! Four of them! They took the Chantilly road, and were going only at a trot."

"It's my opinion we'd do well to imitate them," muttered the officer.

"Never! On at a gallop, and we'll have them soon!"

"We'll not get through the great forest without losing half of our animals."

"We can obtain others at Chantilly."

"As you will," said the old soldier in a resigned tone.

The cavalcade started off again with a loud clash of steel and clatter of hoofs. Chantilly was reached without further incident. It was high time. Men and horses were exhausted. Duretête took three men with him to requisition fresh animals at the castle. The rest of the group sat at tables beneath the arbor of an inn to partake of some refreshment. While gulping down his food, Vauselle questioned host, servants, and grooms. He obtained detailed information. They had seen the four horsemen. The men had stopped at this very inn for a light meal. They seemed quite happy except for the youth who occasionally sighed in a melancholy manner. A big fat jovial fellow and his amusing little friend had aroused the grooms' admiration—the one by his enormous appetite and the other by his unquenchable thirst.

"About what time was this?" asked Vauselle.

"Nearly noon."

Duretête reappeared with the fresh horses from His Majesty's stables. Vauselle, once again in a frenzy, wished

to leave immediately, but this time His Eminence's officer rebelled.

"Though we have not yet covered a quarter of the distance, twenty of the King's finest horses have already been worn out. From now on we can get only the relay horses from the post route and cannot count much on these. We must, above all, take care of our mounts. The fugitives, much more prudent than we, have apparently been most careful of this."

"That only means a better chance to overtake them."

"You mean, a better chance for them to show their heels to us."

"You seem to take great pleasure in delaying us!" exclaimed the excited Vauselle.

"*Sarpejeu*, sir," answered the vexed officer, "I delay no one! If you're in such a hurry, there's no reason why you shouldn't go ahead by yourself."

The prospect of a tête-à-tête with Bergerac seemed to calm the brave Sieur de Vauselle.

"What shall we do then?" he asked.

"The one intelligent thing—act like reasonable men instead of spoiled children. We can continue through the first part of the night at a moderate pace. At Amiens we will replace the horses most exhausted. The fugitives must have chosen there one of the many roads to the coast."

"Which will they have taken?"

"They may have started for Saint-Valéry, Montrueil, Boulogne, or Calais."

"Oh, I know Bergerac. He will continue straight ahead, because that is the shortest route."

"It is also the most dangerous."

"Another reason for him to prefer it!"

"Well, whichever it is, we must be ready for every possibility. They will have to procure a boat for the crossing. If we send ahead our best-mounted horsemen to scout in every direction we shall be able to cut off all possible escape. Before the fugitives can obtain a boat, all the channel ports will be closed in accordance with the Cardinal's orders."

Turning to the Musketeer, the officer said:

"You, Monsieur d'Artagnan, are a man of experience; what do you think of my plan?"

A deep wrinkle appeared on d'Artagnan's brow, and his only answer was an indefinite "hmm!" Vauselle looked at the officer suspiciously.

"And what shall *we* be doing in the meantime?" he asked.

"We?" said the veteran. "We shall continue on our way with the dozen men who are left, ready to go at once to the place where the fugitives are traced."

"Impossible!" cried Vauselle. "We should be only twelve."

"But they are four!"

"You have not met Bergerac! He is the Devil!"

Duretête suddenly broke his prolonged silence:

"The Devil!" he repeated, shuddering. "Yes, yes, it is true; he is the Devil himself!"

The officer no longer cared to continue the conversation; with a shrug of his shoulders he turned his back on the group.

"Very well, do as you like. I wash my hands of the business."

Vauselle, at last triumphant, gave his orders in a loud voice.

"To horse! Forward! Orders of the Cardinal!"

"If we ever catch them," whispered the officer to the Musketeer, "I hope to be hanged!"

The pursuit began again with increased vehemence. The cavalcade, half hidden in the heavy foliage, traversed the forest of Lys at a fast trot. A halt was made at Beauvais. Night fell as they left. The horses were frightened by the deep shadows of the trees and shied continually. A drizzle began to fall; the horsemen pulled their long cloaks more closely about them. But their advance was not checked in the least. Vauselle and Duretête were wide awake. Mad hatred filled their hearts and their hatred seemed to dominate the troop.

D'Artagnan judicially weighed the chances:

"They should be at Amiens now. They are probably resting in some safe place. We shall almost catch up with them by dawn. But we shall be entirely exhausted, whereas they can begin again with fresh strength."

The cavalcade suddenly came to a halt. The hot-headed Vauselle, who had been leading the group, galloped back to them with a woe-begone look on his face.

"There is a fork in the roads," he explained, perplexed.

"Yes, I know the place," said d'Artagnan. "One road leads to Breteuil and the other is the short-cut to Crèvecœur."

He smiled, remembering an episode of his younger days:

"Personally, I always choose the short-cut."

"We will take it, then," declared Vauselle.

The advance continued. The road was narrow and thick rows of trees loomed on either side. As they progressed the darkness became thicker. The slippery roadway caused the horses to lose their footing constantly. When they reached Crèvecœur it was impossible to continue without becoming hopelessly lost. They were forced to stop at the first inn they saw and awaken the sleeping servants. After stabling their horses the guards foraged for whatever food was to be found and then stretched out on beds of straw.

D'Artagnan spent the rest of the night drying his clothes in front of the fire, and playing at dice with His Eminence's officer of the guards. A bowl of spiced wine helped to relieve the monotony.

Long before dawn Duretête and Vauselle arose and rushed from stall to stall, awakening the sleepers and speeding all preparations. Their nervous excitement soon spread to the entire group. This day would determine the result of their efforts. The sky was clear and the air warm; the fresh morning breeze raised their spirits.

"A day made to order!" observed the old officer as he climbed into his saddle.

The cavalcade started off, more eager and more determined than on the previous day. They saw the roofs and steeples of Amiens just as the sun was about to rise. The bells of the old Picardy cathedral were ringing for early mass when the troop entered the city. Opposite the cathedral the doors of *The Picardy Arms* stood hospitably open. Vauselle stopped and, dismounting, called loudly for the host. A fat red-faced man appeared.

"Something to drink at once!" ordered Vauselle. "Cardinal Richelieu's men do not like to wait."

Servants hastened to bring beakers of wine to the troopers who did not take the time to leave their saddles. In the meantime, His Eminence's envoy had begun to question the host.

"Have you seen a group of cavaliers recently? Four of them! One man has the nose of a parrot: there was also a horse with a white star."

Yes, they had been seen the previous evening. They stopped, apparently, at *The Royal Lily*.

"Where is that?"

"First street on the left-hand side."

Another halt was made at *The Royal Lily*. The four horsemen had taken supper there. They had made enquiries about a place where they could obtain fresh horses. They might have found them at *The Image of Our Lady*.

"How does one get there?"

"Beyond the bridge, on the right."

Vauselle was worried. Had the fugitives procured fresh horses? The host at *The Image of Our Lady* said that the travellers, unable to obtain what they desired, had decided to pass the night at Amiens.

Vauselle felt relieved.

"When did they leave?" he asked.

"Two and three-quarters hours ago," squeaked a sharp female voice.

A fat woman appeared, holding a greasy torch in her hand; she looked suspiciously at the group of soldiers in front of her.

"Oh, those men were neither Christians nor good Cath-

olics," she continued, "particularly the man with the big nose. He tried to pass a bad coin on me. I don't know what it was, but he called it a Spanish Doubloon."

A muffled groan came from the centre of the cavalcade. Duretête moved nervously in his saddle; his eyes gleamed wildly. Furtively he made the sign of the cross.

"Well, my good woman," continued Vauselle, "is that all you know?"

"Oh, la, yes! The three men left at four o'clock."

"Three!" exclaimed the spy.

"As they were about to leave they couldn't find the fourth."

"Zounds! Which one?"

"The little fellow. The red-nosed villain who drank all the time and tried to kiss the servants."

"Oh, the wretch!" groaned the turnkey, recognizing this description of Linières.

"But if that is so," resumed Vauselle, "he must still be here."

"Oh, sir, you should have seen him! We found him this morning lying between two wine barrels in the cellar."

"The cellar!" shouted Vauselle as if he had been struck with a hot iron.

D'Artagnan looked at the two bloodhounds with a mischievous twinkle in his eyes. Turning to the officer, he said:

"What an amazing pair! One cannot bear cellars and the other is terrified of doubloons. And yet both those things are excellent."

"We finally lifted the drunkard to his horse," con-

cluded the old woman, "and beat the animal with brooms until it started on its way."

"At last we have one of them!" exclaimed Vauselle exultantly. "Come, gentlemen, away! At a gallop!"

The officer offered no objections. The cavalcade disappeared in a cloud of dust and was soon out of sight.

CHAPTER II

A DESPERATE ENCOUNTER WITHOUT CASUALTIES

This news of the four horsemen revived the spirit of the pursuers. The fugitives' lead was now reduced to four or five leagues, through their inability to obtain fresh horses, and they were still thirty leagues from Boulogne. The final stage of the chase began with chances about equal.

But the King's cavaliers were now excited by the prospect of soon seizing one of their adversaries. Vauselle, stretching his long body over his horse, rode far in advance. He resembled a bird of prey swooping down on its helpless victim. His hideous smile showed his sharp teeth. There was nothing human about the man—a greyhound after a hare. And this trembling frightened hare that was fleeing for its life was Linières—his former assistant who had deserted to the enemy; one of the jailers of Master Coquillart's cellar!

Mademoiselle de Minou's lover, spurred on by his thirst for vengeance, reached the top of a steep hill from which the road could be seen stretching out before him like a long ribbon. He suddenly thrilled. In the distance a small black spot was advancing along the road.

"A horseman!"

Turning in his saddle, Vauselle called back in a loud voice:

"Hola! Quick, gentlemen! The quarry is cornered! After him!"

Having given this command, he raced after the poor victim at a furious pace, not waiting for the cavalcade to complete its slow ascent of the hill.

Linières, hearing the sound of galloping hoofs, turned. He saw behind him a wild, centaur-like person, half-standing in his stirrups; his eyes were flaming and he shouted savagely. Linières immediately dug his spurs into his horse's flanks, panic-stricken. Clinging desperately to the mane of the galloping steed, he commenced a mad flight. The rows of trees along the road rushed by with dizzy speed.

But Vauselle kept gaining. Little by little the fleeing figure became larger. Linières, realizing that he was being overtaken, hugged the horse closely so as to offer a smaller target. A useless precaution! Vauselle was upon him, a naked sword in his hand. With an instinctive movement of defence, the little man drew an enormous pistol from the holster. He sensed the insane hatred of his adversary. He was lost! With a last effort of despair he cried:

"Cyrano, help, help!"

"He again!" murmured Vauselle, suddenly sobered. "Can that bully be near?"

Swiftly he looked about. He was alone; his companions were out of sight. A horrible fear began to fill his heart.

"Help, d'Artagnan, help!" he roared at the top of his lungs.

Vauselle then blindly thrust his sword at the frightened Linières, who, shutting his eyes, turned sideways in his saddle and stretched out the pistol. A loud report—the horses shied and reared, neighing frantically. The two combatants, panic-stricken, fled desperately in opposite directions. And so ended this epic struggle in which Cyrano and d'Artagnan had, by proxy, exchanged a pistol-shot and a sword-thrust!

Vauselle did not stop until he had rejoined the cavalcade. Finding himself in the midst of his followers again he at last felt safe. Once more his self-confidence returned, and he said boastingly:

"Come, gentlemen, they will soon be ours. I have just put their rear-guard to flight."

During this time Linières galloped along the road as if a hundred devils were chasing him. A gradual astonishment overcame him when he realized that he was not being pursued. He stopped and looked at the smoking pistol. Then, sitting up proudly in his saddle, he exclaimed jubilantly:

"I have killed him! I have killed the enemy!

Never had the little toper felt prouder of himself. He spurred on his horse in order to join Cyrano at once, and tell him the wonderful news. But, alas, his poor horse was exhausted. Just outside a large village it stumbled and fell to its knees. It was impossible to raise it again. The hapless Linières took off the saddle, and immediately began to walk along the road, carrying the saddle on his back. He was an abject figure when he entered Longpré.

Fortunately Cyrano and his companions had stopped at the one inn in this part of the country, two hours before; this inn was also the relay post for the coach. Linières there found *Stello* and Saint-Amant's steed, which had at last been exchanged for fresh horses. The Cavalier, however, had refused to give up *Capitan;* such an animal, he had declared, could go to the end of the world without tiring.

Cyrano, always foresighted, had left instructions for his belated friend. He was to be given the least exhausted of the two horses. Linières chose *Stello*. A quarter of an hour after his humble entry into the village, he galloped out of Longpré, proudly mounted on the Gascon's noble steed. He might, with luck, overtake his friends beyond Abbéville. So he galloped down the road toward the diocesan city, the famous capital of Ponthieu.

But it is time we rejoined the three horsemen in front. The highway ran through a low swamp-land. The riders continued at a steady trot in complete silence. The rays of a hot sun beat down on them.

"*Bone Deus!* What a broiling day!" gasped Saint-Amant, removing his hat.

"Why, Sir Satan, it can't be as warm as yesterday morning when you were in the hellish regions of Gentilly!" laughed the Cavalier.

Cyrano paid no attention to this talk. He had not spoken a word since leaving Abbéville. He was obviously plunged in reflection.

"What's wrong with Savinien?" whispered Saint-Amant to his companion. "He's as silent as a corpse."

"I think Linières' absence disturbs him."

"Zeus! I expect to see the satyr appear any moment from behind one of these trees."

At last Cyrano broke his prolonged silence:

"Cavalier, why did you refuse to change horses at Longpré?"

"Are you still worrying about that? Where can I find an animal that is *Capitan's* equal?"

The swordsman looked at the proud horse and a troubled frown appeared on his face.

"How far are we from the sea?"

"About twenty leagues from Boulogne," answered the former sailor.

"Is that Saint-Valéry on the left?"

"Yes, only three leagues away."

"Can you go from Saint-Valéry to England?"

"It's perfectly easy, on two conditions: find a fishing smack whose captain will agree to make the crossing, and take advantage of the tide."

"When is the tide in?"

"Towards two o'clock, at this time of year."

"It's not quite eleven yet," murmured the swordsman to himself; then he suddenly turned to Saint-Amant and said: "Do you think the citizens of Saint-Valéry dislike Spanish doubloons?"

"*Parbleu!*" exclaimed the astonished fat man. "That is different, very different!"

Cyrano again relapsed into silence. The Cavalier urged *Capitan* ahead until he was abreast of his friend. With his usual quick directness he said:

"What is on your mind, Cyrano? You seem troubled."

"Why hasn't Linières rejoined us?"

"Oh, is that all! What is there to fear? Let them pursue us as much as they like! We shall reach Boulogne before sun-set. If we don't find a boat there, we can continue on to Calais tonight. There we are safe!"

"He has had time to catch up with us."

The Cavalier uttered a low expression of surprise: Cyrano hadn't even been listening to him. The Gascon could only think of Linières and his incomprehensible disappearance.

"Devil take the drunkard!" cursed Tancrède.

Saint-Amant, who was riding behind suddenly uttered a cry:

"Be careful! A horseman is approaching us!"

The little group came to a halt at once. The three men shaded their eyes with their hands and looked at the object that Saint-Amant had pointed out.

"Can that really be a horseman!"

Indeed, the spectacle was such as to justify this remark. There was no trace of a man in the distance, but only a horse that rushed ahead furiously. Soon a strange growth could be distinguished on the horse's back. "It's he! It's Linières!"

Yes, at last the tardy toper had reappeared. The terrified Linières was clinging desperately to the horse; when he saw his friends, he waved a handkerchief frantically.

"*Mordious*, the animal is running away with him! Good heavens, it's my *Stello* that he's treating in this barbarous manner!"

Cyrano could no longer restrain himself, and rushed forward to intercept the newcomer.

"Stop, fool, stop!"

Linières, unfortunately, was in no position to obey this injunction. His hands and legs were hopelessly tangled in the reins and bridle. This only excited the horse all the more and he dashed past his master like an arrow.

"Cavalier!" cried Cyrano. "Stop *Stello!*"

At this call of his friend, Tancrède jumped quickly from his saddle, and dexterously seized the bridle of the runaway horse. The animal reared, but finally became calm.

"Well, loiterer, what has happened to you?" asked the Gascon.

White with terror, the little man gasped:

"I . . . I have just left the . . . the battle!"

"Battle! Zounds, I was sure of it, we are pursued! How many are they?"

"They are . . . one!"

"Only one! Come, you're dreaming."

"No, not at all. He was a fierce man with a long, sharp sword."

"How did you ever escape from such a demon?"

"By killing him!" replied the drunkard calmly.

"You killed him! *You?*"

"With this very pistol! Only one shot—bang!"

"And you say he was alone?"

"Yes, but as he fell, he cried: 'Help, d'Artagnan!'"

"D'Artagnan!" exclaimed Cyrano. "Quick, on our way!"

The Cavalier had succeeded in calming *Stello*, and Linières with his assistance was once again mounted. The little man sighed contentedly.

"Ah, me, it was a terrific fight. I wonder that I am

not wounded. Wait, stop, good God! I feel blood! Yes, I was sure of it! I have been hurt."

Saint-Amant passed his hand over the tippler's saddle, and then raised the blood-stained fingers to his lips.

"*Parbleu!*" he exclaimed, almost suffocating with laughter. "Your blood tastes very much like wine!"

The truth was that Vauselle's sword had struck the leather bottle which the provident drunkard had carefully fixed to the saddle. The precious contents of this bottle were now oozing forth drop by drop.

"Oh, the double-dyed scoundrel has destroyed my reservoir! Alas, woe is me, the blow is mortal! Let me die in peace!"

"Yes, at the next tavern!"

"Zounds, I'll make the fellow pay for this!"

"But you've already killed him!"

"I'll . . . I'll kill him again!"

Cyrano did not join in the banter. He kept repeating:

"D'Artagnan! The Cardinal's henchman! It could not have been otherwise!"

He turned toward Linières:

"Where did this fight take place?"

"Near Picquigny."

"There must be a large number of them," remarked Saint-Amant. "But they are wasting their time trying to obtain information about us. As long as they keep together we are probably safe. I know this country well. A short distance from here we reach the cross-roads. There are four different routes; they lead to Boulogne, Saint-Omer, Montreuil, and Saint-Pôl. Beside that there is a short-cut to Saint-Valéry."

The Gascon was listening attentively.

"If worse comes to worst," continued the poet, "we can always bear off toward the right, where the country is less settled and is infested by Imperial scouts."

"Yes," agreed Tancrède, "if we go toward Arras we shall be in the midst of the war zone. They will not dare follow us there."

Cyrano returned to his reflections, and asked himself: "How could such a clever chap as d'Artagnan be so stupid as to let slip the advantage to be gained by following Linières? They could have discovered our position quite easily by letting two or three guards keep the drunkard in sight. The Musketeer seems to have inexplicable lapses."

But whatever the explanation, danger was imminent. The best hope for the fugitives was in speed.

"Ride at a gallop!" commanded Cyrano.

The four horsemen advanced for a league at a pace surpassing that of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. The Gascon surveyed constantly the road in front and behind. There was no sign of the pursuers. During one of these reassuring surveys, he noticed that the Cavalier was being outdistanced.

"*Mildious!*" he groaned, turning pale. "*Capitan* is limping!"

"No, never!" cried Tancrède, pressing his spurs lightly into the horse's flanks. "Pure imagination, Cyrano! Come, *Capitan*, my friend!"

The noble animal tightened its muscles to respond to his master's command. In three bounds it had regained its place in the group. But almost immediately it fell back

again, lowering its head as if in shame, and limping painfully.

"Halt, everyone!" ordered Cyrano.

They had just come in sight of the cross-roads of which Saint-Amant had spoken. A sudden transformation took place in Cyrano. His eyes shone fiercely beneath his perplexed brow as he felt the thrill of an approaching fight. With quickness he made his decisions. When he finally gave his orders, his voice was so changed that his friends hardly recognized it.

"Out of your saddle, Cavalier, and take my horse."

The dejected Cavalier obeyed.

"From now on, Tancrède," continued Cyrano, "you must keep your head. This road leads to a place on the coast two leagues from Saint-Valéry. The tide will be in at two o'clock. That leaves you three hours to get a boat and put to sea. Do you follow me?"

The Cavalier bowed his head, blaming himself for their present predicament; he no longer dared oppose his wiser friend.

"As soon as you reach England, go at once to Brighton. Wait there until next Saturday—not a day longer. If by then you have no word from me, go straight to London and see no one except Madame de Chevreuse. And this time, my boy, no rashness. Your position is a dangerous one. Go!"

"Oh, Cyrano!" exclaimed the young man, his eyes filling with tears.

Cyrano pointed in the direction of the dunes.

"Go!" he repeated.

"No, no, I can't, my dearest friend. Danger is near; I cannot leave you thus. . . ."

"In the name of the Queen and of Claire de Cernay I command you! Obey!"

"No, no! you are about to sacrifice yourself for me. Promise me that you will flee at once."

In a vibrant voice the Gascon said:

"I promise that if you remain obstinate a second longer, I will not budge from this spot, and, before your very eyes, will surrender myself without resistance to the Cardinal's followers!"

"Oh, Cyrano, you are cruel!" cried the miserable youth, knowing that his brave friend's decision was irrevocable. "What can I do! I will obey you and leave. Farewell!"

"But not without first embracing me!"

Cyrano, half-sobbing, advanced with open arms toward the youth. The two friends held each other close in a farewell embrace. Then they separated. Tancrède soon disappeared behind the ridge of sand-dunes.

"He's a brave lad," murmured Saint-Amant, strongly affected by this scene. "What a pity that he still has more heart than head!"

The Gascon, shaken by the separation, motioned for silence, and then said in a low voice:

"And now, as to you two, you are to take the road to Arras. In a day you will reach Dunkerque and from there you can cross to Brighton."

"And you?" asked Saint-Amant.

"I will keep *Capitan* and start toward Boulogne."

"In other words, you will draw the pursuers after you, and *in order to gain three hours*, will oppose them alone. And we shall be saved at your expense."

"Enough, ninny! Come, this discussion is delaying us. Leave me at once!"

"Your plans may be quite all right for the Cavalier, my dear Savinien, but of my own free will, I came with you, and of my own free will, I stay."

"I too!" agreed Linières, who, remembering his recent adventure, felt it would be wiser to be near the valiant Gascon.

"And even if," continued the former sailor, "there are a score of these scoundrels following us, we can fortify ourselves somewhere and hold them off at least for three hours!"

"Three hours," repeated Cyrano, slowly giving in to his friend's logic. "Very well, I agree, we'll stay together."

The three men quickly sprang into their saddles, and left at a sharp trot. A few moments later the fat poet noticed his friend drop a sparkling object on the road.

"Ah, ha," he said, smiling approvingly, "Cyrano has thought of everything. The enemy will now have a clue to let them know which road we have taken."

In the meantime Vauselle and his followers had reached Abbéville. Vauselle's cowardice at the meeting at Picquigny had allowed Linières to escape, and since then the cavalcade had been searching for some sign of the fugitives. The last trace they had discovered was the exhausted horse at Longpré. The passage of Cyrano's group through

Abbéville had been noticed by no one. The pursuers had to call a halt. Lack of information made it difficult to decide on the next stop.

Vauselle, riding in the rear, was engaged in conversation with d'Artagnan. He felt safe near the Musketeer. The old officer had taken advantage of this opportunity to resume command of the troop. On leaving Abbéville, the officer had sent two troopers ahead to act as scouts. One of them was now rushing back at a gallop. He had discovered the cross-roads and, leaving his companion to continue the search, had returned to give them the information.

"Four highways and a short-cut?" exclaimed the perplexed officer. "This is the very devil! What do you think of it, Monsieur d'Artagnan?"

"We'll have to see for ourselves."

This suggestion was none too definite. Vauselle advanced to deliver his opinion. But the officer had not forgotten his conduct with Linières, and roughly silenced him.

"Thanks to your stupidity, the fugitives know that we are on their trail, and are sure to be cautious. Your insane idea of keeping us all in one group results in our interfering with each other. The four horsemen now have the better chances in this affair."

"Here comes your second scout, my good friend," interrupted d'Artagnan. "Perhaps there will be more news."

The horseman approached quickly holding in his hand a shining object.

"A purse," cried Vauselle.

"Where did you find it?"

"On the Boulogne highway."

The brave Vauselle had already seized the purse, and, hastily opening it, drew out several gold pieces.

"Doubloons!" he exclaimed.

"Spanish doubloons!" gasped Duretête. "There can be no doubt now. It's he! Forward at a gallop!"

"They're at it again!" muttered the officer. "Where will those two fools lead us in the end?"

D'Artagnan followed in a leisurely manner. The Musketeer's cool brain and habitual skepticism did not lead him to believe in miracles. He smiled quietly to himself at the coincidence of the Spanish doubloons. On reaching the cross-roads, his sharp eyes searched the dunes carefully. Another amused smile appeared on his lips.

CHAPTER III

THREE AGAINST TWENTY

Not far down the Boulogne road, the cavalcade met a brewer's wagon. The driver, overwhelmed with questions, took his pipe from his mouth and stated that he had passed a small group of horsemen.

"How many?"

"Oh, maybe three, or four—maybe five."

"Five! Impossible! How far away?"

"Oh, not so far, but not so near. And one of them—his horse will founder."

"*Capitan!*"

"Yes, 'tis so! I heard them say '*Capitan.*'"

Vauselle uttered a cry of triumph. *Capitan* had gone lame! The troop pushed on at increased speed, their ardor now at fever pitch as a result of this news.

The driver began again to jolt along the rough highway.

"See now, those fine fellows are in too much of a hurry to be polite. Ha, ha, now I think of it, there were *three* horsemen!"

D'Artagnan, following in the rear, pondered an insoluble question.

"*Capitan* lame! And they allow the one horse to retard the entire group! Bergerac must be mad!"

Near Nouvion the road made a double turn to avoid a large swamp. D'Artagnan, who began to feel the excitement of the chase, advanced to the front of the troop and galloped along by the side of the leader. After the first turn, the two officers saw the fleeing horsemen. They had only a brief glimpse, for the fugitives had made the second turn and were at once swallowed up in a little wood. Yet, in spite of the shortness of the glimpse, the Musketeer's sharp eye had done its duty.

"Only three! I was sure!" he muttered.

Suddenly the old officer exclaimed:

"Quick, the black horse! It's falling!"

Cyrano had looked back, and, recognizing the martial figure of his eternal enemy, had shaken his fist in defiance; at this moment, poor *Capitan*, no longer held up by the reins, had fallen to the ground. The on-rushing guards greeted this fall with a loud cheer of triumph.

But the swordsman was already on his feet. One of his companions had returned at his cry, and Cyrano sprang behind him on the horse. They then disappeared in the thick woods. Yet what difference did this make! They could not go far, with two men on one horse.

The cavalcade had swiftly rounded the second turn and entered the forest. Then, in complete astonishment, the soldiers were forced to come to a stop.

"*Sarpejeu!*" cursed the officer. "Not a soul in sight!"

The road stretched straight ahead for a long distance, but not a person could be seen. The fugitives had vanished. Recovering from his surprise, the officer ordered the guards

to search on both sides of the road. He himself led a small group into the forest on the left. Their progress was stopped abruptly by a pile of crumbling ruins. At the end of an overgrown path was a small house, surrounded by a dilapidated wall. The house had an enormous roof of moss-covered tiles; the façade was pierced by a single large door tightly bolted through a loop-hole protected with bars. The building had apparently been constructed years ago for work in the nearby bogs. On the back and along the sides, muddy stagnant water made any approach impossible. There was something sinister about the appearance of the place.

At a command from the officer, a soldier advanced towards the house. He had not gone a half-dozen paces before a sharp explosion rent the air. The large, curly head of Saint-Amant was seen for a moment at the smoking loop-hole.

"Just a polite shot into the air to give you warning," explained the fat giant. "It's an old naval custom."

D'Artagnan, hearing the report of a gun, hurried to the spot with the remainder of the cavalcade.

"There are three of them," said the old officer to the Musketeer. "Unable to escape, they have barricaded themselves. What do you think we should do next, Monsieur d'Artagnan?"

The Musketeer looked at the ruined house, and a perplexed frown appeared on his face. He suddenly saw the shining barrels of pistols menacing them from the loop-hole.

"*Mordi!*" he remarked quietly. "We should retire! The affair is becoming a bit warm."

As he finished this declaration, there followed three flashes from the loop-hole and the sound of hissing bullets. The soldiers had had time to conceal themselves by the side of the road, and no one was hurt by the first volley. Reassured on this score, the two officers returned to a little knoll where Duretête joined them. It was more difficult to discover Vauselle, but he finally appeared from the ditch into which he had thrown himself on hearing the sound of firing.

The four men held a brief council of war. The soldiers were spread out in a semi-circle about the ruins. Protected by the trees, they held their muskets ready to fire. After the smoke had cleared away, the house resumed its appearance of a deserted ruin. Surrounded on three sides by the bog, it could only be reached by the path in front. And this path was quite easy for the besieged persons to command from two points: the loop-hole and a dormer-window above.

The prudent officer hesitated to expose his men to the fire of invisible enemies. But Vauselle was vociferous in his objections:

"Why, they're only bandits! They have already opened fire on us. We must drive them from their lair and seize them dead or alive."

The veteran stroked his mustache thoughtfully, and answered:

"An assault would be costly."

D'Artagnan decided to take a part in the debate:

"*Mordi!* these gentry seem determined to resist. They have been kind enough to give us warning. I think it is our duty to try persuasion."

"What!" exclaimed the indignant Vauselle. "Make

terms with rebels! Retreat before a handful of rascals! Four cowardly criminals!"

"Four, you say!" cried the surprised officer.

"*Parbleu*, yes—the Cavalier, Bergerac, Linières, and the fat man make four, don't they?"

"But I only counted three!"

This remark had an unhappy effect on Vauselle; his uneasiness was evident.

"The devil, has one of them escaped?"

"I don't know definitely but when we rounded the bend I counted only three."

"And you, Monsieur d'Artagnan?"

"I? Hmm, I thought there were two."

The Cardinal's bloodhounds looked at each other anxiously. There seemed to be a mystery attached to this affair.

"*Sarpejeu*," growled the officer. "We have just one sure way of telling. How many reports did you count when they fired?"

"Three," stated Duretête.

"We must know for certain. Why not send an envoy to them?"

"Bravo, Monsieur de Vauselle! At last you are talking sense. Go and try to clear up this mystery."

"I!" shouted the valiant spy in alarm. "Oh, Monsieur d'Artagnan, why don't you go?"

The Gascon first bowed politely in refusal, and then suddenly changed his mind.

"Well, I won't say no! But what can I offer them?"

"Promise them the Cardinal's complete forgiveness."

Duretête uttered a low growl.

"Shh!" said Vauselle, with an equivocal smile on his lips. "It's one thing to promise and another to fulfil. . . ."

A penetrating look from the Musketeer cut short this declaration.

"No nonsense," remarked d'Artagnan in a cold, dry voice. "His Eminence's instructions are simple and clear: to seize the Cavalier Tancrède and bring him back alive."

"And yet Bergerac!" objected Vauselle.

"Monseigneur said nothing about the others."

"Yes, *palsanguienne*, that's true!" cried the old soldier, enjoying the discomfiture of the two confederates.

"If Monsieur de Bergerac desires to leave with his friends —always excepting the Cavalier—without firing, we have no right to stop him."

"Obviously," agreed the officer. "That is an admirable solution, and it spares innocent blood."

"But if the youth isn't there?" asked Vauselle.

"Then we must make other plans."

It was impossible to object to this; d'Artagnan was following his instructions to the letter. With a gesture of resignation, Vauselle gave in. During this consultation which was to decide the fate of his mortal enemy, Duretête had maintained a sullen silence, while his eyes travelled from one speaker to the other. When he realized that his infernal tempter was to be offered freedom, he quietly disappeared. No one, at the time, noticed his sudden exit.

D'Artagnan descended the slope of the hill. Drawing a handkerchief from his pocket, he tied it to the end of his sword, and then walked confidently toward the ruins. Everything that he knew combined to make him sure of his action. He had no doubt but that the Cavalier had left

his friends at the cross-roads, and that Cyrano had barricaded himself in so as to allow his friend time to reach a seaport in safety. Having succeeded in this ruse, the swordsman would no longer have reason for resisting, since he would come out with all the honors of war. D'Artagnan was quite correct in his conjectures, except for one thing: not being familiar with the sea, he had forgotten the all-important question of tides.

As soon as he was within hailing distance, he cried:

"Gentlemen, in the name of the King!"

A head appeared at the loop-hole. A moment later, a door opened to give passage to a man who bowed politely to the Musketeer. D'Artagnan returned this with a flourish of his hat. He had recognized Cyrano and at once proceeded to explain his mission.

"If I understand you correctly," said the swordsman, surprised at this unexpected proposition, "your offer is to allow me and my friends to leave here in safety."

"With the one exception of the Cavalier Tancrède."

"Hmm, a tempting offer—if there is no trap behind it!"

"A trap! Monsieur de Bergerac, such an insinuation is unnecessary when two soldiers are talking together."

"Very well, then! I will answer you with the frankness of a soldier: my friends and I thank you for your generous offer, but it is impossible for us to accept."

"Why?"

"Because we cannot permit our comrade to fall into your hands."

This equivocal answer seemed to confirm the Musketeer's suspicions. When he spoke again it was in a lower tone:

"We have no desire to make any such demand of loyal

gentlemen. Only leave your barricade; we will take care of the rest."

"What a pity it is only noon and the cursed tide doesn't come in for two hours," muttered Cyrano to himself. "I should like to see the faces of these bloodhounds when, after our departure, they found no Cavalier within!"

"Well, sir, what is your answer?"

"Definitely no!"

"*Mordi,*" cursed the Musketeer under his breath, "am I wrong? If they refuse it must mean that the youth is with them."

There seemed, indeed, no other possible explanation of the poet's obstinacy. D'Artagnan tried again.

"Come, this cannot be your last word. Why ruin yourselves by a useless resistance? We are twenty and you are only . . ."

"Four!" interrupted the Gascon.

"Four, if you like! Consult again with your friends."

"It's no use! They have sworn to obey me."

"But after all, there is only one of you who has the right to accept or refuse an offer of safety. And that person is the Mysterious Cavalier."

After a slight hesitation, Cyrano answered:

"The Cavalier has sworn as well as the others!"

"Let me speak to him."

"No, *mordious*, no!"

Paying no attention to this remark, the Musketeer had now reached the embankment. From here he could survey the house more easily. He was still disturbed on one point: why did the Cavalier not show himself if he were there?

"We'll soon know!" he thought.

In a loud voice he cried:

"Cavalier Tancrède, the life of your comrades is in your hands. Surrender, and they will be free!"

"*Mildious!*" shouted the enraged Gascon. "Don't answer, Tancrède! I forbid you!"

For a very good reason, no voice answered. The door of the house had been quickly closed. But d'Artagnan had seen enough. A smile was on his lips as he said:

"Thank you. I now know what to do."

"Make an assault?"

"Why do that?"

"*Capédédiou,* to seize the Cavalier!"

"*Sandis,* Monsieur de Bergerac, do I look like a simpleton? Before we could seize him he would have to be there!"

"What do you suspect then?"

"That the youth is far away from this place. If he were here, he would long ago have surrendered himself to save you!"

The poet turned pale. His enemy had guessed the truth. His apparent generosity in coming forward to make his offer had been for a definite purpose—to find out if the bird had flown the nest. And now he knew! Alas, they could now continue the pursuit on the right trail. How was he to gain those two precious hours? Ah, Tancrède was lost this time!

These thoughts passed swiftly through his head in a moment. Furious at having been tricked, Cyrano cried: "*Corbac,* are you mad? The Cavalier is here, *mordious,* but he is protected by our swords. And if the Cardinal's

gentlemen desire to confirm this fact they have only to try to enter the house. But first I advise you to seek reinforcements, because, after all, you are only twenty and that is not enough!"

"Yes, of course," remarked the skeptical Musketeer. "Yet if he hears us, why doesn't he appear?"

"Because I forbid it! Do you hear, Cavalier, I refuse to allow you to show yourself!"

As he gave this command, in a loud voice, the swordsman turned toward the interior of the house; d'Artagnan followed the pantomime with a malicious twinkle in his eye. Suddenly Cyrano's voice failed him, while the cold perspiration broke out on the Musketeer's forehead. Three figures had appeared at the little window underneath the roof. The three men seemed to be on guard, ready to open fire: their pistols flashed in the bright sunlight.

"*Morai*, I am wrong!" gasped the astonished Musketeer. "He is there! Why the devil did he not speak to me?"

"Because he has made a vow," explained the poet, quickly recovering his self-possession, "a vow of silence."

There was no excuse for further parleying. The impossible had turned out to be true. D'Artagnan was face to face with the Cavalier, and he had now to perform a soldier's duty. Besides, Vauselle and his companion had seen from their observation post that the four men were all accounted for, and were now impatient over the length of this conference.

"Your friends are growing restless, Monsieur d'Artagnan. I hope to see you again soon. I must prepare now to sustain your assault worthily."

With a courteous but frigid bow, the leader of the fugitives began his march back to the troop.

"Monsieur de Bergerac," cried the Musketeer, "I beg of you, one word more about the . . ."

He was unable to finish. A pistol-shot rent the air. Cyrano, who had turned around at the Musketeer's call, jumped quickly back. The bullet had come so near him as to relieve him of his hat.

"Where did that shot come from?" asked the thunderstruck d'Artagnan.

"I must congratulate you, my friend, on your unusual method of conducting a parley!"

Furious at the insulting sarcasm of his adversary, the Musketeer repeated:

"Oh, *mordi*, where did the shot come from?"

He had just time to take refuge behind a tree, for the besieged fugitives answered the unexpected shot with a volley. The attackers did not hesitate to follow suit. Consequently the unfortunate envoy found himself between two fires. His roving eyes suddenly distinguished a large, formless shape in a corner of the wall.

"Duretête!" he exclaimed. "Oh God, the coward!"

His first shot having failed, the jailer was reloading his weapon. Zounds, they had spoken of sparing Bergerac! It was a work of piety to kill such a man. Luckily, he, Duretête, had made no promises. The tempter, the man who had led him to destruction, was there in front of him! Ah, God help him! Only a miracle had saved him from the first shot. Better luck next time!

"Coward, coward!" repeated the disgusted d'Artagnan.

In the meantime the old officer, from his distant post, un-

able to understand what had happened, hurried forward. His face was crimson with rage as he shouted:

"The villains! The brigands! To fire on an envoy! No mercy for them now!"

The Musketeer, sick at heart, joined him. The two men at once made preparations for the fight. Half of His Eminence's guards were ordered to dismount and take their horses a short distance away where they would have the protection of the woods. The officer arranged the remainder of the soldiers in a semi-circle within gun-shot of the ruins.

"Be on your guard," he advised. "Keep your eyes on the loop-hole and the window. Fire at sight!"

"And you," he added to the first group, "are to advance on foot behind your horses. Join again under the protection of the wall by the side of the road. Wait till I raise my hat, and then, all together, scale the wall."

The soldiers prepared to advance, leading their horses by the bridle. The animals, camouflaged with branches, formed a moving bulwark. Before the men could advance, d'Artagnan stopped them with a gesture:

"A moment, please! Since there is to be a fight, I must take my proper part. As a lieutenant of His Majesty's musketeers I take precedence over your officer. Therefore, I intend to direct operations. Follow me!"

He sprang quickly to the front. His appearance was greeted with a volley from the besieged men. Waving his hat, he cried:

"Forward, for the King!"

"Long live the King and the Cardinal!" shouted the guards, following their new leader.

In a shower of bullets, d'Artagnan advanced toward the wall step by step. Fortunately, a steady fire from the ambushed soldiers in the rear prevented the besieged from stopping this dangerous manœuvre. Thanks to their support, the Lieutenant reached the wall safe and sound. The enemy could not fire on him there. The soldiers with d'Artagnan were likewise unharmed. Only two horses, innocent victims of this desperate struggle, fell during the advance.

The first part of the attack had been successful. Before beginning the second, d'Artagnan allowed his men to catch their breath in the shelter of the wall. He looked about anxiously for Duretête. Once again the jailer had disappeared. Where could he be?

Slipping along the wall to a large crack, the Musketeer examined the interior of the house. One man was on guard at the loop-hole. The others were at the window above. No, there could be no doubt—four men protected the ruins. It was impossible to see their movements clearly. One of them seemed to disappear and reappear like some marionette; he apparently kept loading a weapon for his neighbor whose eyes and the arm holding a gun, alone could be seen. D'Artagnan could distinguish the silhouette of the third person at the window. He was hidden in a long cloak and wore a torn hat. This man kept a position slightly behind his two companions, and in the midst of the firing, preserved an extraordinary sang-froid.

D'Artagnan had no time for further investigations. The elder officer had made a signal, and the ten men assembled at the foot of the wall. When the veteran removed his hat, the soldiers began to scale the wall. It was a crucial

moment. The Musketeer, more agile than the others, was the first to reach the top. A heavy rain of bullets from the guards behind passed over their heads and struck the ruins. The men at the loop-hole and the window promptly replied. The bullets of the soldiers had caused a cloud of dust and small stones to be dislodged and to fall on the attackers, making it difficult for them to see. D'Artagnan was nearly blinded. Jumping to the ground on the other side of the wall, he cried:

"Follow me, in the King's name!"

The detachment charged across the short space that separated them from the house, and rushed against the door. To their surprise they were brought to a complete stop. The door was too solid. It gave way neither at the first blows nor at the furious assaults that followed. The raking fire from the loop-hole paralysed their movements. Nevertheless, the hinges of the door were beginning to show signs of weakness when suddenly there came a terrible crash. From the window above a huge form had hurled a large oak table into the midst of the besiegers, spreading destruction and panic. The soldiers hugged closely the side of the house. Danger surrounded them on every hand. The situation was serious. A scowl of perplexity darkened d'Artagnan's face. Four of the ten had already been disabled.

Luckily the old officer appeared at this moment with reinforcements. In the front of the group came two horses dragging the heavy trunk of a tree. It took only a moment to raise the trunk to the top of the wall and let it fall down on the other side. One of d'Artagnan's men crawled to the improvised battering-ram and seized the ropes that were

attached to it. It was an easy task to pull it forward.

"Be careful," warned the Musketeer. "Now is our chance. The enemy will be watching the men who are trying to scale the wall. We must act at once."

The tree trunk was lifted by six pairs of strong arms, and the task of smashing the door began. The moment was propitious. Cyrano and his friends were busily occupied in repulsing the reinforcing party. When they realized the new danger, it was already too late. Under the blows of the powerful battering-ram, the door was beginning to crack and fall to pieces. A final terrific effort succeeded in demolishing it.

A cry of triumph greeted this success. The besiegers, greatly encouraged, rushed toward the breach. But the opening was narrow and it was necessary to enter in single file. The men in front had scarcely passed through before a sudden backward movement began.

"*Morguienne!*" shouted the enraged officer. "Go ahead!"

"We can't advance!" cried a soldier, falling to the ground in agony. "There is a barricade inside."

The two officers finally reached the breach and were able to discover for themselves the obstacle. Indeed, it was serious. Before them was a formidable barricade composed of rafters, old furniture, and loose planks. Behind this a man guarded the entrance to the stairs. The lone defender was in his shirt-sleeves, and his bare, muscular arm grasped a huge iron bar. He was of colossal size, and looked at his adversaries with mocking eyes, while with maddening composure, he kept puffing on a small, black pipe that a sailor alone could smoke. Even the bravest

would hesitate to come within the reach of such an arm.

While the officers were examining the situation, a whisper was heard from above:

"Saint-Amant!"

"I am here," answered the giant.

"It's seven minutes past one."

"Good," replied the fat man phlegmatically. "Only fifty-three minutes more. We'll hold the fort easily!"

This dialogue, apparently without significance, brought a sudden smile to the Musketeer's face.

"Oh ho, so that's it! The defenders must resist for a certain length of time. Hmm, there is some reason for this."

But could they keep the barricade for such a long time? It had taken the attackers only a half-hour to smash in the door!

By this time Vauselle had joined them. The delay annoyed him, and he kept grumbling to the soldiers. The prudent Musketeer took advantage of this unexpected difficulty to withdraw from the group. Two points aroused his curiosity; first, where was Master Duretête; second, who was the fourth person inside the house. For he now began to have grave doubts again as to the Cavalier's actual presence.

Off toward the right, the Musketeer noticed a shed attached to the ruins. To reach it, it was necessary to cross a stretch of bog several yards across; to all appearances it was impossible. He examined the ground more carefully and saw a black ridge of earth stretching beneath the water. With the greatest precaution he stepped upon this bridge, or, rather, ford. Placing one foot carefully

before the other, he advanced; at first the water was ankle-deep, and then above his knees. A final daring leap landed him on the other side.

D'Artagnan found himself close to the house, separated from his followers by the bog that extended far to the right and left. The greater part of the dry land was occupied by a series of sheds, the last one being on the edge of the forest. No one could see the Musketeer. This side of the ruins was protected by a high wall in which there was no opening except for a small door, closely fastened and obstructed by a mound of earth.

At last d'Artagnan was alone. He first looked toward the window, which could be more easily seen from this angle. The person whose presence so disturbed him remained in the same position. The man seemed to be immovable.

"The devil!" muttered the Musketeer.

A second later the frown on d'Artagnan's face disappeared, and he seemed to lose all lust for battle.

"Ha, ha," he laughed quietly. "At last I understand!"

A violent uproar broke the long period of silence. The Musketeer listened intently and heard the sound of cries, blows, and the smashing of heavy articles. The barricade was being attacked.

"Very well," he murmured, "they can do what they like now!"

His mind was completely at ease. He seated himself in the shelter of a shed to await the outcome. Scarcely had he done this when he seemed to hear the noise of crackling branches from the direction of the forest. A shadow

could be seen in the distance—doubtless some wild animal. The Musketeer however, followed the animal's movements with interest. Yes, he had guessed right. The animal, covered with a thorny shell—a kind of exaggerated porcupine—advanced quickly past the sheds. Reaching the wall, the beast rid itself of its shell and stood up. The shell was an enormous bundle of broken branches, dead leaves, and dried peat. And the animal itself displayed the grotesque form and the long hairy arms of Master Duretête.

"What, my friend the jailer! Luck is with me, I was looking for him. What in the devil is he up to now?"

The jailer, his back to d'Artagnan, was on his knees before the wall. He seemed engaged in some mysterious occupation. The Lieutenant advanced from his shelter. Dame Anastasie's husband was too busy to hear him approach. The Musketeer was now so close that he could have touched him. When he saw what Duretête was doing, he almost cried aloud in horror. While the besieged fugitives were engaged in resisting the assault of the guards, the scoundrelly jailer was preparing to attack in his own way, from behind, with a cowardly, pitiless weapon—fire!

"The ruffian! He is going to burn them up! But *Mordi*, this time his treachery can be stopped!"

Duretête had finished his preparations, and proceeded to remove the earth from before the door. After once opening the door, it would be quite simple to slip inside the house and set fire to the bundle directly beneath the feet of the besieged men. The jailer had already lighted the dry branches and the peat; sharp, blinding smoke began to ascend. D'Artagnan, at the man's heels, did not

miss a single one of his movements. He saw him push the burning bundle toward the door. Was the fool going to try to burn the door down? It would be a lengthy process! But at this moment the turnkey pulled a rusty key from his pocket and rubbed it with ghoulish glee.

"Oh, yes, I had forgotten! A jailer has a key for every occasion!"

Duretête put the key into the lock. A minute more and the crime would have been committed. D'Artagnan seized the cowardly rascal by the shoulder.

"Master Duretête," he said calmly, "what do you mean by being so far away from the battle?"

The astonished jailer turned around, one hand still holding the key. On recognizing the visitor, a strange look, half humble, half threatening, appeared on his face. The Musketeer scattered the burning bundle with a kick. The jailer jumped backward as if he had been struck in the face.

"Go away!" he roared.

D'Artagnan quickly slipped between the man and the wall. Duretête advanced a step, his arms stretched out menacingly.

"Down with your arms, beast!" exclaimed the Musketeer, striking with the flat of his sword.

Duretête, like a wounded animal, retreated slightly and then prepared to spring. D'Artagnan waited for the attack. To his surprise, the jailer did not move. A slight movement on the part of the Lieutenant had allowed the jailer to see the door. His eyes burned dully as he cried:

"The key!"

"What key?"

"The key . . . in the door . . . it's not there!"

"Oh, nonsense!"

"Give it to me, Monsieur d'Artagnan."

The Musketeer shrugged his shoulders.

"By all the saints I ask you to give it to me. Let me have it—or suffer the consequences!"

D'Artagnan answered this threat by extending his naked sword. Duretête, foaming at the mouth, retreated. The only color in the pale face was in his blood-shot eyes.

"Master Duretête, you are not well. You don't realize what you are doing. Listen to me: do you know what is done with a man who shoots at the enemy during a truce!"

The miserable wretch lowered his eyes.

"He is shot. And a man who flees from the fight and starts a fire in this abominable manner is hanged. Take your choice!"

The Lieutenant's calm but threatening attitude succeeded in destroying the jailer's confidence. D'Artagnan looked at the man scornfully and then began to walk away. Duretête rushed after him and fell to his knees, weeping:

"Please, please, Monsieur, give me the key! This is my revenge; it is more than my life to me. I promise to make no fires . . . I will harm no one—except him! He alone—the Devil! Then kill me afterwards!"

"You scoundrel, what do you mean by your talk of a key?"

"You have it—you!"

"I, or the Devil, perhaps!" exclaimed the Musketeer, preparing to cross the bog again.

The enraged jailer looked madly at the locked door and

the dispersed bundle of burning fagots. His revenge was disappearing harmlessly in smoke. Shaking his fist at the retreating Lieutenant, he shouted:

"Curse you! The curse of God upon you!"

When d'Artagnan reached the front of the house, a shout of triumph gave warning that at last the barricade had fallen. He rushed toward the breach. The giant Saint-Amant stood on the remains of the barricade, defending himself stoutly. His arm still wielded the iron bar which by this time was badly bent. In his teeth he held the stem of the pipe.

"Surrender!" cried the old officer.

"Never!"

"Surrender!" ordered Cyrano from above.

The jovial fat man threw his bar at the victor's feet. Sitting down on a timber, he wiped the perspiration from his face and then muttered his eternal:

"That's different! Yes, very different!"

The officer advanced to the foot of the stairs. Thinking that the fight was over, he called:

"I congratulate you, gentlemen, on your brave and honorable defence. Descend now and you will all be given quarter."

Instead of answering this declaration, the voice above asked:

"What time is it, Linières?"

"Zounds!" cried the veteran. "Do you mock me? I offer you safety and you answer by talking nonsense!"

Cyrano's head appeared at the top of the stairs.

"I am not mocking you at all, sir. It is a matter of great importance. My friend the Cavalier and I have

agreed to surrender the place at a certain hour. Well, we need fifteen minutes more."

"Seventeen, my good friend!" corrected the precise Linières.

"*Sarpejeu!*" cursed the officer, thinking this some new exhibition of humor. "This is no laughing matter. If you wish to risk your lives on such a piece of absurdity, very well. We'll drive you out of here, and then don't ask for mercy!"

"Agreed!" answered Cyrano, descending the stairs and drawing his sword. "And you up there, Linières, make sure that you watch the time exactly!"

"The man is insane!" whispered the veteran to the Lieutenant.

"Do you think so?" said d'Artagnan.

In the bottom of his soldier's heart, the Musketeer admired the fiery poet. Cyrano was offering himself as a sacrifice solely on a point of honor and in accordance with his oath. *Mordi*, there was something noble about that—something worthy of Athos!

A fierce fight had begun on the narrow, winding stairs. The soldiers, excited by their chief's cries of encouragement, rushed furiously on their lone adversary, anxious to finish this absurd struggle at once. The swordsman, his back to the wall, dominated his opponents, with his calm eyes and flashing sword. He withstood firmly their most violent attacks.

At regular intervals, Linières' high voice rose above the clashing of swords and the panting of the combatants, as he continued:

"Twelve! . . . eleven! . . . ten! . . ."

CHAPTER IV

D'ARTAGNAN CURSES A PRIEST

After two days of riding and three hours of fighting, the heroic swordsman and poet was beginning to feel tired. And his weariness was more of the mind than of the body; the strain was telling on him. But he still must keep to his promise and hold his enemies at bay.

"Nine!" shouted Linières.

Only nine minutes more and the Cavalier would have gained his full three hours' start! Soon Cyrano de Bergerac, faithful to his word, could surrender his sword. In the meantime that terrifying weapon flashed in and out, keeping the astonished assailants at a respectful distance. For one moment, however, it seemed that this furious defence might come to a sudden end. One of the soldiers had succeeded in climbing the stairs behind the swordsman. He was about to spring forward when an extraordinary backward thrust from Cyrano, who had not even turned his head, sent the daring guardsman crashing to the floor in the centre of the combatants.

"Eight!" cried Linières, showing his head for a second.

By this time Tancrède should be at sea, sailing toward the chalky cliffs of England.

"Seven! . . . six!"

Cyrano deigned to begin a retreat, step by step. The soldiers of the King, eager to turn the retreat into a rout, rushed forward triumphantly but in vain. The flashing sword still made an impenetrable barrier. The minutes passed in slow succession. At the foot of the stairs d'Artagnan, his brother-officer, and even Vauselle, felt a strange emotion at the sight of this epic fight in which one man was holding in check twenty skilled adversaries—all for the sake of that ridiculous, sacred thing called honor!

"Five! . . . four! . . . three!"

Cyrano had reached the top step. His bent sword was of little use. Feeling the end near at hand, the guards closed in on him. The Gascon made a sudden lunge. A man fell back, wounded. He was the first person that the swordsman had tried to touch and he had done so with a feeling of regret. In this tremendous struggle to preserve his own honor, the brave poet was willing to give up his own life but he felt that he had no right to take the lives of others.

"Two!" announced Linières.

"*Mordious!*" muttered Cyrano as his sword broke in two.

The trapped poet discarded the useless blade and seized the empty scabbard as a weapon.

"One!" panted Linières.

It was now a mêlée of fists. The soldiers threw away their swords and tried to grasp with their hands this indomitable opponent. Ten strong arms stretched forward to hold him by the arm, by the leg, or by his clothing. Cyrano drew himself up for a supreme effort.

"The hour has struck!" cried Linières in a solemn voice.

At last the swordsman gave in. His face was bloody and his clothes torn when he finally surrendered. His superhuman nerve had disappeared simultaneously with the announcement that the hour had arrived. The guards lifted him to his feet and passed him from shoulder to shoulder down the stairs. The almost lifeless body was finally placed on the ground near d'Artagnan, who heard the Gascon mutter just before losing consciousness:

"Tancrède . . . I have kept my promise!"

The battle was over. Vauselle, anxious to be the first to seize the prize, rushed up the stairs. Oh, to have the Cavalier at last! He saw the young man standing quiet and motionless against the wall. Pushing roughly to one side Linières who made an attempt to stop his progress, he ran forward to the prisoner, and cried proudly:

"Cavalier Tancrède, I arrest you in the name of the King!"

The youth did not make the slightest gesture in response. Vauselle grasped him by the collar. But suddenly the brave spy jumped backward as if he had gone mad. He rushed to the stairs and descended them even more quickly than he had mounted.

"Tricked!" he shrieked. "They have tricked us again. The young soldier is not there!"

"The Cavalier?" asked the old officer in astonishment. "Why, nonsense, we saw four of them!"

"*Patatras!* Do you know who the fourth man was? A dummy!"

Yes, they had been tricked. They must begin the pursuit once again. They had fought for three long hours . . . and for nothing! Vauselle's fury was beyond de-

scription. Duretête, who had just reappeared, contemplated Cyrano's collapse with a gloomy joy. D'Artagnan and his colleague withdrew to a safe distance, chuckling at the extreme discomfiture of Vauselle. The old veteran was a great admirer of ruses in warfare, and he looked with sympathy at the prostrate form of the brave fighter. Cyrano, thanks to Saint-Amant's good offices, was now beginning to recover consciousness.

But time was passing and some plan of action must be arranged. Vauselle drew his colleague to one side, and the two engaged in an animated conversation. They then returned to the officers to announce their decision. Since the chances seemed slight of seizing the youthful fugitive in France, Vauselle would continue straight ahead to Boulogne and thence to England. Now that he no longer had to fear meeting the terrible Cyrano, a small escort would suffice. The old officer could, if he liked, satisfy his conscience by searching the neighborhood with the remainder of the troop. Those of the party who had been wounded would be left at this place along with Duretête. They would serve to guard the prisoners, who must be kept here, as neither group wished to be encumbered with them. When the older officer decided to return to Paris, he should take Duretête and the others with him.

The veteran was delighted with this solution as it rid him of the domineering Vauselle and his sullen companion. When d'Artagnan was asked his opinion, he said:

"My presence here does not seem at all necessary. The worthy Duretête can quite easily keep watch over the prisoners—after all, that's his business. Nor do I have any reason to remain with Monsieur de Vauselle. He has his

instructions and I have mine. Therefore, with your permission, I shall act for myself."

The Cardinal's bloodhounds accepted this proposal with ill-concealed joy. They would both feel much happier away from the too-observant Musketeer. Before separating, it was only necessary to find a prison for the captives. The turnkey proposed to bind them hand and foot to a pile of logs. But the two officers objected vigorously; honorable prisoners of war could not be treated in such a barbarous manner. The Musketeer then pointed to a flight of stone steps at the end of the room, which led to a small, dark cellar below. The place seemed made to order. The door was heavy and solid, and had a grilled loop-hole through which the jailer could observe the prisoners.

"A cellar!" exclaimed Vauselle joyously. "On my word, a cellar! What a lucky find!"

Paying no attention to the grumbling protests of Duretête, who preferred his own plan, he pushed the helpless prisoners toward the stairs.

"To the cellar, my fine lads! Ha, ha, every dog has its day!"

The resigned Linières and the phlegmatic Saint-Amant descended into the dark hole first. Cyrano looked at Vauselle with haughty disdain, and then, without a word, followed his companions. The door closed heavily.

A few minutes later Vauselle and his escort started off toward the north. D'Artagnan, the old officer, and the rest of the guards left in the opposite direction. In the house, now transformed into a jail, there remained only the prisoners, Duretête, and four more or less injured soldiers.

The Musketeer accompanied the veteran as far as the cross-roads. There he stopped, saying:

"My dear fellow, I must leave you here. I shall not be able to return to Paris for some time. When you see His Eminence again, I beg you to tell him how Lieutenant d'Artagnan has fulfilled his instructions."

"Like a man of spirit, and so I shall tell him," replied the officer. "After all, it's not our fault that these two fine fellows went off on the wrong trail."

"I agree with you."

The old officer leaned toward the Musketeer and whispered:

"Shall I tell you my honest feeling? I shouldn't be at all displeased if the young fugitive were now crossing the Channel!"

"And shall I tell you mine? I shouldn't be in the least surprised if he were!"

Having thus relieved their secret emotions, the brother officers shook hands warmly.

THE troop soon disappeared beyond the dunes, and d'Artagnan, now alone, took the right-hand road. The reader may be surprised at the Musketeer's choice of the Arras road—much the longest and the least safe. The explanation is that Vauselle had taken the direct route, and our friend had no desire to fall in again with the unpleasant spy. D'Artagnan's remaining official duty was to deliver His Eminence's message to Lord MacLegor in London.

As there was no particular hurry, he allowed his horse to take his own pace. D'Artagnan was soon plunged in deep reflection. He thought first of his present difficult

task, but it was not long before his mind travelled back to the years gone by. Ah, *crédi*, one could not spend an adventurous youth as the bosom friend of the valiant Athos, the intrepid Porthos, and the subtle Aramis without preserving fond memories in one's heart!

The Musketeer then thought of Cyrano and his unfortunate companions. He wondered what he would have done if the positions had been reversed.

"After all, these brave men have only accomplished their duty as I should have tried to do it in their place! Good heavens, what have they attempted that I haven't tried myself! Yes, and gone them several better, *cadédis!*"

The Lieutenant slackened his pace. He seemed to leave the scene of battle with a certain regret.

"Bah, who am I to pass judgment on the conduct of others! Is my own conscience any too clear at this moment? And yet I am forced to expose those three courageous fighters to Richelieu's wrath! Oh, hard necessity, *dura lex*, as that rascal of an Aramis would have said!"

The Musketeer started off again at a trot, as though trying to escape from an overpowering temptation. But a few minutes later he once again slowed down.

"*Sangodemi*, the cup is bitter! To leave three—*three*, that magic number!—brave fellows in a vile hole under the watch of that foul Duretête! Zounds, why didn't I run my sword through the coward when I had him alone, far away from prying eyes! Yes, I should have nailed him to his precious door like some unclean beast."

The idea of a door naturally evoked that of a key, and the traveller put his hand into the pocket where he had deposited the turnkey's key. He stopped, hesitating.

"Oh, what a maddening temptation. No, no, it is impossible. A soldier is concerned solely with his honor. If only I were a simple gentleman!"

He spurred his horse furiously on. But what a thing is chance! Here he was, still not far from Cyrano's improvised jail, and night was about to fall. In the marshy district of Ponthieu, the nights were frequently accompanied by almost impenetrable fogs. And one of these fogs was now rapidly enveloping him. As a climax to his bad luck, a storm could be seen brewing in the distance. Already several large, warm drops had fallen from the overcast sky.

The Musketeer rode on steadily. He was now lost on this unknown road. Several serious dangers faced him. The capital of Artois had fallen into the hands of the French several months before, but the neighboring country was by no means pacified. The Imperial forces still held the country between Lens and Bapaume, and frequent expeditions were made into the flat territory adjoining. It was well known that in passing the environs of Arras one ran the risk of falling into the hands of the Archduchess's patrols.

The night was dark. D'Artagnan could no longer see his own horse; he would soon be swallowed up in this terrifying fog. Suddenly the horse stopped, sniffing the air. In the distance a pale circle of light shone through the fog. The startled Musketeer listened intently.

"It sounds as if there might be a camp nearby! Friends or enemies?"

He advanced cautiously. But once again his horse stopped and began to neigh. A few yards in front red lights flickered in the darkness.

"A patrol! Careful, now!"

He turned to the side of the road. Too late! The neighing of his horse had been heard. The patrol advanced upon the solitary horseman.

"Who is there?" cried a voice through the fog.

"France!" answered the Musketeer, who had already recognized the soldier's uniforms.

Finding that the newcomer was a lieutenant of the King's Musketeers, the leader of the patrol offered to conduct him to the camp, only a short distance away. This was a mere formality; after it had been complied with, he could continue his journey. D'Artagnan readily consented. Unfortunately, the colonel, who alone had the power to pass on his credentials, was at a neighboring village.

"Oh, this is stupid!" exclaimed the impatient d'Artagnan. "All this rigamarole seems unnecessary. I am on the Cardinal's service."

The captain apparently was not one of the Cardinal's staunch admirers. On hearing Richelieu's name, a peculiar smile appeared on his face.

"I am heartbroken, dear Lieutenant! But my orders forbid me to allow anyone to pass."

"Oh, I know that refrain! Orders, always orders!"

Quite unconcernedly the captain continued:

"You can spend the night at the vicarage in the village. I'll have you conducted there at once. I assure you it is a pleasant spot. Our chaplain is there now. He's a most charming and talented fellow."

As a matter of fact, the traveller realized that it was necessary for him to stop somewhere for the night. The fog was heavy and the roads treacherous; besides, the low

rumbling of thunder announced the approach of the storm. The wind increased in strength and the rain was falling heavily. Yet, in spite of all this, the Lieutenant hated to do anything under duresse; he was most anxious to stop, but disliked being stopped.

The vicarage was a delightful little cottage with a typically ecclesiastical charm. The vine-covered windows disclosed snug rooms that seemed most inviting on such a stormy night. The Musketeer's guide led him to a room on the ground-floor—the floor above was occupied by the chaplain—and busied himself with laying a fire. D'Artagnan began to recover his spirits. He looked out of the window and saw the flashes of lightning and the bivouac fires of the camp in the distance.

After laying the fire, the soldier asked the officer what he would like for supper.

"Nothing, thank you. You may leave, my boy."

A few moments later d'Artagnan turned from the window, and approached the fire. He was amazed to see his guide preparing a bed of cushions and blankets on the floor.

"My good fellow, didn't you understand? I wish to be left alone."

The soldier politely replied that his orders were "not to leave the Lieutenant."

"*Sandis*, are you here to spy on me?"

"No, but to wait on you."

"Still another person who only knows his confounded orders!" grumbled the Musketeer.

He paced the room restlessly like a caged animal. But a few minutes later he had calmed down, and closing the window, he threw himself on the bed.

"All for the best, *vertudi!*" he muttered. "If I had been at liberty tonight I should have done something foolish."

The room was warm and the bed soft. An almost religious silence prevailed. Within a few minutes d'Artagnan had fallen into a heavy sleep. The attendant observed this, and soon stretched out on his rougher bed. The Musketeer had been asleep for about half an hour when he was suddenly awakened by a tremendous racket. The noise came from the floor above and was a combination of heavy stamping of the feet and loud cries.

"Have at you! . . . Counter quarte, zounds! . . . Parry this one! . . . Touché!"

The Lieutenant jumped out of bed, terrified.

"Good God, they're fighting above!" he cried, rubbing his eyes.

No, there was complete silence. Was this a nightmare? And another strange thing: the soldier had not moved from his bed.

"I was dreaming," thought d'Artagnan as he started to get back into bed.

But the din began again with increased vehemence. The ceiling shook under the powerful tread of feet. The Musketeer heard the familiar sound of clashing swords.

"Jove, fellow, are you deaf? People are cutting each other's throats up there and you are as peaceful as if you were at church."

The soldier smiled.

"It's nothing, Lieutenant. Only Monsieur l'Abbé at his practice."

"The Abbé! *Jarni*, that priest seems to have an extraordinary way of reading his breviary!"

"Yes, every evening Monsieur l'Abbé fences with the provost—to keep in training, he says."

"In training! Is he a swordsman then?"

"Apparently. They say that he went through many a pretty fray before he assumed the cassock. At any rate, he's no novice, since it's always the provost who comes off worst."

The noise was now more subdued and the lieutenant got back into bed.

"Devil take the priest!" he groaned. "Was there ever such an absurdity? *Sandi*, a man belongs either to the church or to the army, either to the cassock or to the sword!"

Soon d'Artagnan fell into a quiet slumber. The noise of the camp was stilled. The storm seemed to have passed. The only sound was that of the rain dripping on the vines and honey-suckle bushes. A window was opened on the floor above. Then came the soft sound of a voice; a sweet song rose toward heaven. At last the worthy Abbé was singing the evensong. But little by little the voice became louder and the sound of a guitar could be heard.

"*Sacrebleu!*" d'Artagnan swore, once more awakened. "At it again! Can one ever sleep in this mad vicarage!"

"M. l'Abbé is singing," explained the soldier. "He likes to keep his voice in training."

"Zounds, his voice is loud enough to reach paradise! First he must keep his arm in training and then his voice. What a remarkable priest! Good heavens, and now here's something new!"

CHAPTER V

"ARAMIS!"

D'ARTAGNAN, listening carefully, heard scraps of a song. And, as heaven was witness, this song had nothing in common with the psalms!

"Mistress . . . faithless . . . love!" came the words.

"*Cordi*, this is a fine business!" exclaimed the astonished Musketeer.

"Monsieur l'Abbé only sings words and music of his own composition."

The Lieutenant leaped to his feet.

"Zounds, it seems decreed that I shall not sleep tonight! This is not a house of God, but hell itself!"

"Oh, it's like this every evening."

"Every evening! Tell me, my friend, does your chaplain end by going to bed?"

"Not before having supper, Lieutenant."

This statement was confirmed at once by the clattering of dishes and the sound of a table being moved into position.

"He has supper in addition? That's the climax! Well, my good fellow, you must call on this priest and tell him

I have had a tiring day and need sleep. Present my compliments and ask him to be quiet."

"But that is impossible. Monsieur l'Abbé's suppers are always noisy."

"Well, he can change his custom for once. Or, if he is bent on raising the roof, I'll go upstairs and help him."

Seeing that the Lieutenant was really out of temper, the soldier hastened to obey.

"Come, this priest is beginning to get on my nerves. I hate ecclesiastics who are neither fish nor fowl."

The soldier returned, with a sheepish look on his face.

"Come, tell me at once! Will he keep quiet?"

"Lieutenant, Monsieur l'Abbé is very sorry but he cannot dine in silence."

"What!"

"But if the Lieutenant does not sleep well, he begs him to come up and have supper with him. Monsieur l'Abbé hates to drink alone!"

"We'll soon find out," exclaimed d'Artagnan, mounting the stairs. "It will be interesting to meet this Abbé who says his prayers to Venus and Bacchus."

He knocked at the door.

"Come in," said a pleasant voice.

The officer pushed open the door. And at once his rage disappeared. The room was warm and cosey; a jolly fire crackled on the hearth. A lamp, covered with a delicate silk shade, lighted a table where a delicious meal was spread on an immaculately white table-cloth. The person who had inspired this epicurean scene sat engulfed in a large arm-chair after the manner of a feudal lord. The Musketeer could distinguish only the slim, elegant line of

the body, half hidden under a cassock, and the beautifully moulded hands that rested on the arms of the chair.

The newcomer could not help being impressed by the enchanting peacefulness of the room and the distinguished appearance of its occupant. He looked rather dubiously at his dishevelled clothes and mud-stained boots. But, like all good Gascons, he hid his discomfiture under an air of extreme self-confidence and began a complimentary speech half serious and half jesting.

"Good Lord," interrupted the well-modulated voice of his host, "must we go through such absurd formalities, d'Artagnan?"

The astonished Musketeer opened wide his eyes. The priest arose, and walked toward him with outstretched hands.

"Are you not always a most welcome guest to Aramis?"

D'Artagnan could not speak for a moment. The two men embraced warmly. Finally the Lieutenant found his voice.

"Aramis! Ah, *mordi!* Ah, *sandi!* Ah, *cadédi!* What an amazing meeting!"

"D'Artagnan," said the priest with a delighted smile, "you must be dying of hunger. Sit there and tell me what you think of the soup."

"Ah, *corbac,*" muttered the Musketeer, seating himself at the table. "I should have expected this. An Abbé, a swordsman, and a poet—who else in the word could it be but Aramis?"

"And I, my dear fellow, why didn't I recognize you a league away? An enraged Gascon, sending an ultimatum to a quiet servant of God!"

"Hmm, quiet!"

"Who could that have been but d'Artagnan!"

The two men clasped hands affectionately over the table.

"But, good heavens, you're not eating! Doesn't my simple fare please you?"

"Simple fare, *mildiou*," exclaimed the appreciative Musketeer. "I can see, Aramis, that your religious life has not induced you to renounce the world and its pomps."

"Well, what do you expect? The exigencies of heaven must be reconciled with the necessities of earth."

"And, as always, you are the man to reconcile them," remarked the Lieutenant as he did honor to the bountiful supper.

The two friends had not seen each other for ten years. On looking at one another more closely, they were both surprised to find so little change. Aramis, in particular, was still the jolly companion of the old days, in spite of the forbidding cassock. D'Artagnan had formerly accused his friend of being more priest than soldier; but now the contrast between the austere garments of the priest and the jovial appearance of the face made the man seem more musketeer than ecclesiast. Yet, none the less, the passing of years had created a certain barrier between them.

After the first excited outbursts, the two men looked at each other, finding little to say. This silence became embarrassing. The host broke it by calling:

"Bazin!"

The fat figure of the sexton appeared from the shadows. Approaching, Bazin smiled familiarly at the Musketeer.

"Give Monsieur d'Artagnan something to drink."

Wine loosened their tongues, and they both began to

ask questions about their former comrades. Neither of them had news of Athos or Porthos. They took it for granted that they now lived in the country, far away from the worries of the Court. Athos was probably a philosophic country gentleman, and Porthos a rich landowner, more than ever interested in the glories of this world.

Aramis told the story of his own life during these years in a few words. Immediately after the affair at La Rochelle, he had abandoned a military career and assumed holy orders, which vocation had for him an irresistible attraction.

"Hmm, irresistible!" thought d'Artagnan, noticing the envious look Aramis cast upon his musketeer's uniform.

Soon, however, the monastic life had begun to weigh heavily on the new convert. In order to "reconcile" as far as possible his religious life with his love for his former profession, he had become chaplain to a regiment. In this way he could be with his flock in camp and in battle, and had at times the illusion of an active, dangerous life.

"Illusion—and something more!" remarked the Lieutenant.

They now came to the fruit, and Bazin opened a bottle of rare Rhenish wine. They had exhausted most subjects of conversation; all their friends had been remembered and discussed. But d'Artagnan had said nothing about himself. Aramis put his elbows on the table, and, holding his chin on his hands, asked:

"And you, my dear friend, what have you been doing?"

"I!" exclaimed the Musketeer, obviously embarrassed. "You can see for yourself that I am still the same."

"In other words, you are still a musketeer! Ah, of the four of us, you alone have remained faithful. Forgive my impertinence, but I feel that once again you are playing some sly trick on our old enemy."

"Our old enemy?" repeated the Lieutenant, pretending not to understand.

"Yes, of course, his most worthy Eminence, Cardinal de Richelieu."

"Ah, really," began d'Artagnan, wishing to temporize, "when we think these things over calmly, my dear Aramis, were we always fair to the poor Cardinal?"

"What!" cried the Abbé.

"We were young, impetuous. We had an overpowering desire to place ourselves on the side of the opposition."

"You mean, on the side of the persecuted!"

"Well, it may be the same thing. Today we are older and wiser. We must admit that this Richelieu is a great statesman."

"Oh, of course," said the priest mockingly. "But at times he is a bit hasty; even, may I say, cruel."

"Yes, I agree. But he is full of tremendous ideas."

"Well, d'Artagnan, I see you have come to terms with His Eminence?"

"As you would have done had you remained in the service."

"Hmm, perhaps! It is a difficult question. But I have turned to the church and you have turned lieutenant."

This remark went straight to the heart of the Musketeer, who answered at once:

"Yes, I am a lieutenant of the King's Musketeers!"

"Very well, don't be angry," said the Abbé in his quiet

voice. "So you are facing this horrible weather in order to fulfil His Majesty's commands?"

"No, in order to ful . . ."

D'Artagnan, suddenly subdued by his friend's straightforward glance, hesitated to tell a lie.

"I will be truthful," he said. "I am on my way to England to deliver a letter of the Cardinal's."

Aramis lowered his eyes, and murmured:

"To England! We once went there together! But our instructions were to see Lord Buckingham on behalf of a person who was not associated with Cardinal de Richelieu."

"You are right! But things change!"

"And men also, apparently!"

"Lord Buckingham is dead. . . ."

"Assassinated!"

"But as for the person of whom you are thinking . . ."

Aramis raised his hand.

"Stop, d'Artagnan! She is still alive, thanks be to God. And any man who raised a finger against her would be disgraced forever."

"Be careful!" cried the Musketeer, his cheeks flushed with anger. "Did I say that I had deserted the Que . . ."

He stopped suddenly and bit his lips until the blood began to run. In his desire to explain his predicament, he had almost betrayed a solemn trust. But this was too terrible. To be accused of serving the Cardinal against the Queen—and by Aramis, he who should understand more than any other human being! And yet what reason had he to blame the priest? He could not know that his former companion served both persecutor and persecuted!

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"What a tragedy our meeting is," thought d'Artagnan. "It would have been better never to have seen each other again!"

The priest's sympathetic eyes seemed to express the same sentiment. D'Artagnan jumped to his feet roughly.

"Aramis," he said, "I now understand one thing. It is you, and Athos, and Porthos, who have made the wise decision. If one has accomplished certain noble things, it is better to retire in time before life becomes uninspired."

He had to pause before continuing.

"Farewell," he said quietly. "I am tremendously happy to have seen you once again. But we must admit that it is a tragic farewell. Alas, we are only ghosts of our former selves."

"Nothing lasts," said the Abbé, "man is but dust."

"Yes, our youth is now dead! Peace to its ashes."

The Musketeer started for the door. Aramis, with bowed head, made no movement to stop him. After all, why continue this heartrending conversation which only showed the impassable barrier that divided them? But when the Musketeer began to open the door, his heart failed him. If he once passed through that fatal door, he would be separated forever from his dearest friend.

"No, *mordi*, no!" he cried suddenly, turning around. "I refuse to allow Aramis to believe that d'Artagnan has betrayed the trust that united them in the old days!"

"I have not set myself up as your judge," said the Abbé quietly.

"Perhaps—but yet you are no longer my friend. A stupid misunderstanding must not destroy a friendship like ours. You know and trust me. A solemn secret forces

me to remain silent. I cannot tell you the entire truth. But your heart can supply what my lips are forbidden to utter."

Aramis was not prepared for this sudden change in the tone of the conversation. He looked at his former companion with surprised and enquiring eyes.

"After all," continued d'Artagnan, "you are discreet. I will tell you the truth. I am in a difficult position."

"Just a minute," interrupted the prudent Aramis. "We must get rid of Bazin."

The Abbé instructed his servant to take from the table what he wished for himself and then join the soldier below. Bazin, overjoyed at the prospect of a regal feast, hastened to obey. When this operation had been completed the priest took a comfortable chair near the Musketeer in front of the fire, and said:

"Speak, my dear friend! Aramis listens."

D'Artagnan hesitated a moment, and then began:

"As I have already told you, Aramis, I am on my way to England in His Eminence's service. But that is only my ostensible mission—a mission which allows me safety to act as I like. My real mission is quite different—something secret and delicate. I cannot say much, but it is the question of a woman's honor."

"As in the old days!"

"Alas, not altogether! Formerly we were four and we had only one enemy to face. Now I have twenty and I am alone. But, even more than that, I have undertaken a terribly serious charge: to protect the life of a child."

"A child?" repeated the astonished Aramis.

"Yes! You must understand the situation. The youth

is sixteen years old; he has just escaped from the Bastille."

The Abbé trembled perceptibly.

"Sixteen years old!" repeated Aramis, lowering his eyes and staring at the fire. "But what crime can he have committed at that age?"

"The horrible crime, my friend, of belonging to a family that is doomed."

These words, pronounced in a low, serious tone, caused the Abbé to tremble once again.

"And yet, d'Artagnan, has this youth no protectors?"

"He should have, but . . ." began d'Artagnan. The Musketeer suddenly stopped short, confused. He had almost mentioned the Queen's secret which he had promised to protect.

"Protectors?" he said after a long pause. "Yes, this young soldier of fortune should have them—and such powerful ones that—no, I must not say that. See now how unfortunate he is. He possesses a . . . hmm, what shall we say? Well, a talisman! And it is that very talisman which may cause his ruin."

The Musketeer gave only a hazy explanation of this very difficult part of his story. He was anxious to leave such dangerous ground; with obvious relief he at once began a detailed description of the recent developments. Aramis listened at first with little interest. He had not yet reconciled himself to his old friend's new duties. But little by little the fighting blood of the former Musketeer began to be aroused as he heard the amazing story of the Cavalier's struggle against Richelieu and the heroic deeds of Cyrano. The story of Duretête and his sojourn in hell in the quarries

of Gentilly made an irresistible appeal to the Abbé's sense of humor.

"Jove, what a wonderful fellow that de Bergerac must be!" he exclaimed. "I love him heart and soul already. He reminds me of another Gascon—the cleverest, bravest man I've ever known."

"You are too generous," said d'Artagnan, pressing warmly the hand of the Cavalier d'Herblay.

"Well, come—let's have the rest of the story. I am frantic with curiosity."

The details of the flight of the four horsemen from Paris filled the Abbé with transports of delight. But when he learned that the brave men, overcome by the superior numbers of the Cardinal's agents, had been seized, he exclaimed indignantly:

"And you, d'Artagnan, so brave and generous, have left them in such a position!"

"Not too fast! That is a very different matter from the point of view of my duty."

"Prisoners! And you allow them to remain in a cellar! You admit that they are brave fighters. Oh, it's horrible! *Mordi!* Your Vauselle and Duretête seem to be complete rascals, quite worthy of their master, Richelieu! But we can speak about that later. Return to the Cavalier."

With these words the soldier-priest resumed his meditative air. He began to recapitulate:

"This is the story you have given me: a young man, sixteen years old—a soldier of fortune. He has no protectors. But he still should possess some means of protection!"

"Exactly! As I said, there is a certain talisman."

"And it is lost?"

"Yes, stolen by Mazarin."

"Mazarin?" repeated the surprised Aramis. "And who is he?"

"One of His Eminence's servants whom he has made Secretary of State."

"Enough, I already see the man! Let us talk of this strange Cavalier. Is he tall and slender, with blond, or, rather, auburn hair, and with a girl's complexion and piercing blue eyes?"

"But I never gave you the slightest description of him!"

"Am I wrong then?"

"Either you are a sorcerer or you have seen the youth!"

Once again the Abbé turned his eyes toward the fire as if he were speaking to the flames.

"And as for this talisman," he murmured. "Let's make a guess as to its description: it is of delicately wrought wood, and sealed, I think with a star—yes, a golden star."

"Aramis, you are the Devil himself!" exclaimed the Musketeer.

"You are too kind!"

"You describe that casket as if you had held it in your own hands."

"But isn't that what you were about to tell me?" remarked the priest ironically. "However, we will not argue about that. So your friend Mazarin seized the casket and opened it—and found only trinkets and ribbons and such trifles within!"

"Ah, this time, my friend, you have at last made a

mistake. There was something hidden in this casket."

The Abbé turned pale and hastily asked:

"Have they forced the casket open? That secret, d'Artagnan, was a paper of infinite value."

"Yes, a will!"

"Good God, do *you* know? How have you heard of this will?"

"I have it here!" remarked the Musketeer, calmly placing his hand against his coat.

"Zounds!" gasped Aramis, astonished in his turn.

There was a sudden silence. The two friends tried to make order out of this chaos of ideas. D'Artagnan in particular was overwhelmed. He had taken great pains to keep his former comrade from knowing the truth, and yet the Abbé seemed to have divined everything. Aramis had made no attempt to conceal his interest in this affair. There could be no doubt that he knew of the Cavalier and that some mysterious bond connected him with the young man.

The priest finally broke the long silence:

"Well, God be praised, the case is not hopeless! Where did you lose track of the fugitive?"

"Beyond Abbéville. He was on his way to Saint-Valéry."

"Why did he go in that direction?"

"In order to find safety on the other side of the Channel."

Aramis jumped to his feet.

"In England!" he cried in a hollow voice. "Oh, poor fool! He has changed from Scylla to Charybdis."

"What do you suspect?" asked the alarmed d'Artagnan. "You seem to know this Cavalier. Do you have informa-

tion about him of which I am ignorant? If so, for his sake and even for mine, I beg you to speak!"

The former Musketeer who had saved many a situation by his diplomacy covered his face with his hands. When he finally spoke it was in a changed tone of voice.

"No, I cannot. I have no right to speak."

"I beseech you to. I am facing unknown dangers and have no weapons with which to combat them; it is your duty to help me. Remember, Aramis, that this is the question of a woman's honor, and that that woman is the . . ."

"Keep quiet, as you are a man!" commanded the priest, placing his hand over the Musketeer's mouth. "Even if it were a question of your own mother's honor, you must remain silent."

D'Artagnan answered in a low voice:

"Alas, the poor youth is lost then!"

Aramis paced the room restlessly for a few minutes, and then said sadly:

"Listen to me carefully. You must be sympathetic. My position is a horrible one. Yes, I know this Cavalier! I alone in this world possess the secret of his life. I alone can justly estimate the extent of his dangers. One word from me could save him. And that word is burning in my heart and trembling on my lips, d'Artagnan. And yet I must suppress it, even if I suffocate in the process!"

Although not altogether understanding these remarks, the Musketeer was panting. A terrific tension had arisen during this intimate scene.

"From your very first words," continued the Abbé, "I guessed everything. Do you know by whom this casket was delivered to the Cavalier? By a priest! Yes, d'Ar-

tagnan, by a priest to whom it had been given as a sacred trust by a wounded soldier."

"And this priest was . . . ?"

"Alas!"

"What, you, Aramis! At last I understand! And yet this wounded soldier could have relieved you of your oath of secrecy."

"No, his secret will always remain sacred between God and me. He is dead."

"Oh, impossible! Dead? But who was this man? How could he have possessed such a secret?"

Under his friend's penetrating glance the priest lowered his eyes, hesitating.

"*Mordi*, your silence betrays you! I can reconstruct the story. This wretched man was some mercenary soldier—one of those despicable persons without honor or loyalty who sells his sword to the highest bidder. Isn't it true, Aramis, that some such scoundrel stole the casket—even the youth, perhaps—in order to gain a possible reward?"

"What difference does it now make who he was? I only pray that God save his soul!"

"Do you mean to say that you, a gentleman, would consider a coward's confidence more important than the life of a friend? Would you abandon an innocent child—the son of Lord Buckingham? *Mordi*, that is impossible!"

"D'Artagnan," said the Abbé in a vibrant voice, "you forget that there is something more sacred to a gentleman than friendship: his word of honor. And, for a priest, there is something more sacred than a gentleman's word of honor: the solemn seal of the confessional."

But the Musketeer, carried away by his indignation, listened no longer.

"Very well, keep your secret," he said in a cold voice. "I at least am free. I will go my way and face these unknown dangers. If I die in this task, I shall still have kept my honor unstained. And I pray, Aramis, that the blood of innocent persons may not be upon you."

He started toward the door resolutely.

"Farewell! Tomorrow I shall reach Calais. In three days I shall be in London. There I shall learn what I want to know. I can question a person who has information about all these things."

"Who?"

"Lord MacLegor."

"That man!" cried Aramis, turning pale.

"Yes, the Cardinal's agent, the brother of the Countess of Suttland."

A sudden spasm of agony contracted the priest's face as he moaned:

"Oh, God, I cannot remain silent!"

The Musketeer roughly pushed open the door. Aramis rushed forward, seizing him by the arm.

"Stay!" he cried. "I entreat you to remain! As God is my judge, you must not be allowed to run into these fatal dangers. Give me time to reflect and to meditate. You are tired, my dear d'Artagnan, and need rest. Take my bed! Sleep, sleep, sleep! Tomorrow will be time enough for reaching decisions."

The Musketeer objected at first. His friend's sudden change at the mention of the Cardinal's agents only helped to confirm his own suspicions. The centre of the plot must

lie there. But it seemed to be useless to question Aramis further. The Abbé was sunk in a deep reverie, and appeared impervious to all other matters.

"Bah! I'll leave it all to him," thought d'Artagnan confidently. "If there is any solution to this delicate situation, he will find it. When he begins to search, the clue is as good as found!"

With this sage reflection, the Lieutenant began to divest himself of his coat and boots. Having decided that the future lay for the moment in the hands of Providence, he slipped quietly between the sheets of the priest's bed. But he did not shut his eyes for even the fraction of a second. Through the thin curtain he could observe the slightest movement of his host, every change of expression that appeared on his face. He felt that on the decision his friend was about to make depended the success or failure of his mission.

He saw Aramis rise and go to the bookcase; the priest seized a large folio volume and began to turn the pages feverishly. His lips moved slightly as he read. Gradually the frown disappeared, giving place to a serene smile. At length he raised his head and showed once again the face of the self-confident, subtle Aramis. The Musketeer even noticed an unusual excited sparkle in his comrade's eyes.

"Are you asleep, d'Artagnan?" asked Aramis in his soft voice.

The Lieutenant promptly threw back the covers and sat up, saying:

"You have found the solution, then? *Mordi*, I was sure you would!"

"Hush, keep calm! When are you off again?"

"Tomorrow at dawn. I cannot lose any more time."

"Good! We will leave at dawn tomorrow!"

"We?"

"*Pardieu*, do you think I'll let you face these dangers alone? From what you have told me, I realize that by abandoning you I should be leaving you to a sure death—you and the Cavalier. Consequently, I should almost become the accomplice of your enemies!"

"Do you know who these enemies are, then? Tell me their names."

"Don't ask for that," said Aramis firmly.

"*Mordi*, this surpasses my comprehension!" exclaimed d'Artagnan.

CHAPTER VI

A SERMON AND A KEY

"No, do not ask me. I can tell you nothing. The secrets of the confessional are inviolable; not a single word must escape my lips."

"Well, what can be done? How am I to avoid these dangers if I don't know what they are?"

"But I know them."

"What difference, if you insist on remaining silent?"

"Does a guide need to speak?"

"You will accompany me then?"

"Of course! Haven't I already said so? I shall accompany you everywhere and to the very end of this affair."

"Ah, at last I understand. Since you are condemned to silence, you will be the voiceless guide who protects his companion from unsuspected dangers—the pilot who points with his finger to the submerged rocks."

"Yes! God does not desire that the wicked triumph and the righteous be destroyed. You can count upon my help, my friend. If the priest must remain silent, the gentleman can act."

"*Mordi*, you are wonderful!" exclaimed the Gascon, astonished by the simplicity of his host's solution.

"And now, dear fellow, you must rest. Everything has been taken care of for today."

"Hmm, there is still one little matter that I . . ."

D'Artagnan hesitated, embarrassed to broach a delicate subject. Aramis looked at his friend shrewdly, and seemed to guess the cause of his embarrassment.

"Tell me," said d'Artagnan abruptly, "weren't you reading in that book a few minutes ago?"

"Yes," admitted Aramis, fingering the large folio fondly; "it is an excellent volume: *Casuistry*, by the Jesuit fathers. A very useful book to be read by those who wish to lead a Christian life without falling into that monastic austerity which little agrees with human beings."

"Did you find there that admirable distinction between the priest and the gentleman of honor and action?"

"Well, yes, more or less. I was reading the chapter on 'Confession.' Casuistry, my good man, is the science of those delicate cases in which one's conscience becomes troubled. Through it we learn that at times we can commit certain forbidden actions."

"Without sinning? Hmm, how convenient!"

"Now, now, not too quickly. One must distinguish carefully. The sin is in the act, but virtue may lie in the intention. It all depends on the case and on the purity of the intention."

"Very well," said the Lieutenant, not wishing to argue subtle theological points. "Now tell me, is there a chapter which states the distinction between the gentleman and the soldier?"

"Let us have the case first," answered the priest slyly.

"I'll give you the case in two words. Three brave

men are incarcerated in a cellar, in the custody of a despicable jailer. Well, this cellar has a door, and that door a key . . ."

"And that key?"

"Rests in the pocket of a man who happens to be a soldier."

"What is this soldier to do with it?"

"He is most annoyed at being unable to do anything!"

"Obviously," observed the casuist, "the case is a delicate one. The soldier cannot release the prisoners without being untrue to his military honor."

"Oh, confound duty!"

"But where is this house?"

"A horrible place, half-way between Abbéville and Nouvion; there is a wood on one side, a bog on the other."

A faint smile appeared on the sensitive face of the former Musketeer.

"Sleep, d'Artagnan," he said.

"Sleep, *cadédis!* How can I with this matter on my mind?"

"You must, if you expect me to solve your *case*."

The two men looked at each other significantly. The Lieutenant then slipped quietly into bed. He now understood. His curiosity was so great that he could not close his eyes. Almost an hour passed; he still heard the monotonous sound of the priest turning the leaves of his precious book.

"It must be a difficult matter to solve," thought d'Artagnan.

Finally the room became altogether quiet. Confused shapes and images passed through the Musketeer's head.

He was in a cellar; about him were strange figures dressed in half-military, half-ecclesiastical costumes. A sword in one hand and a large folio in the other, they were engaged in mock battle. The "Case of Conscience" attacked furiously the "Purity of Intentions." In other words, d'Artagnan, overcome by fatigue and excitement, had fallen asleep.

Suddenly a blinding flash of lightning followed by a terrible clap of thunder caused the Musketeer to spring to his feet. He was alone. A large book, illuminated by the flames of a dying fire, lay open on an empty chair. Outside, the storm raged noisily. D'Artagnan seized his jacket and felt the pockets. The key of the cellar had been taken! He glanced once more about the room, and then returned to bed, murmuring happily:

"So Aramis has again found a solution! *Cadédis*, what a pleasant science this Casuistry must be!"

The storm which had so rudely awakened the Musketeer continued to turn the night into a wild, hellish nightmare. Threatening reverberations of thunder were followed by blinding flashes of lightning, and then loud explosions of thunder. The Gods seemed determined to destroy the defenceless earth. Large branches, torn away by the tempest, were whirled about like leaves.

In the midst of this infernal scene, a horseman calmly made his way along the highway toward Nouvion. On reaching the neighborhood of the house which Cyrano and his friends had so stoutly defended, the intrepid traveller stopped and looked about him. A short distance away a pale light filtered through the cracks of a door. The rider

jumped to the ground, and tied his horse under the protection of a wall. He then knocked on the door, crying:

"For God's sake, give refuge to a lost traveller."

Nothing happened. The sound of heavy breathing could be heard from within.

"Open, if you are Christians!" repeated the newcomer. "Would you be so cruel as to leave a poor servant of God to the mercy of this horrible tempest?"

"A priest!" grunted a deep voice.

The door was discreetly opened an inch or two.

"Yes, you are right, I am a priest—the Chaplain of the Touraine Regiment. The demands of my sacred calling have forced me to leave the camp on this ghastly night. I beg you to let me in."

A shaggy head appeared at the crack of the door. Recognizing the stranger's clerical collar which showed above his leather overcoat, the suspicious jailer, muttering an almost inaudible welcome, hastened to open wide the door. The priest slipped quickly inside. The general aspect of the place was not reassuring. The dark room, still littered with the débris of the barricade, answered the traditional description of a den of thieves. Several soldiers, or rather, brigands, to judge from their torn clothes and the bandages around their heads and limbs, were playing at dice before the fire of green boughs, with their guns by them. But the most sinister thing of all was the horrible appearance of the man who had first greeted the newcomer: his face was that of a buccaneer, of a pirate of the worst type.

Having at last gained entrance to the place, the priest, without the slightest embarrassment, relieved himself of his drenched hat and cape. He then made his way through

the group of injured men, and proceeded to warm the soles of his boots before the fire. The beautifully wrought silver spurs attracted the immediate approval of the soldiers. Zounds, this chaplain was not your ordinary servant of God!

After carefully closing and bolting the door, Master Duretête drew near the fire and surveyed with surprised eyes the strange guest who had been driven to this refuge by the wild tempest. The truth was that, since the departure of Vauselle and the old officer, the turnkey, left alone to watch over his prisoners, had been feeling uncomfortable. This terrible night could not but remind him of that other night of agony he had passed in the quarries of Gentilly. He, who usually was incapable of any human sensation, *was now afraid*. He was afraid of the Evil Spirit who seemed to lurk in the shadows—that Devil whom the heathen Cyrano knew so well how to evoke. He trembled violently, expecting to see the Devil appear at any moment and snatch the prisoners out of his very hands. Consequently, being in this frame of mind, the priest's unexpected arrival seemed providential. The handsome face and elegant manner of the worthy father reassured him greatly. He at once became more human.

"Bad night!" he muttered, trying to smile.

"Yes, a night to test the courage of any Christian," answered the priest. "The roads are so washed out that you are likely to break your neck at every step. If it had not been for you, my friend, I don't know what would have happened to me."

"Do you have far to go?"

"The camp is a few leagues away in the direction of Arras. Ah, Zounds—no, I mean, on my word—I have

ruined the lace on my coat. Well, it couldn't be helped; the matter was urgent."

"Death?"

"Almost! Several souls to save!"

The priest glanced swiftly about the room; his eyes paused for a moment on the door of the cellar; he then looked at the group of soldiers questioningly.

"Soldiers of the Cardinal," explained the turnkey. "I myself am one of his agents—Duretête, at your service."

"Followers of the great Cardinal!" exclaimed the chaplain. "Allow me to congratulate you, Master Duretête!"

"Are you His Eminence's friend?" asked the jailer.

"Good heavens, I am certainly no stranger to him! We have been engaged in the same enterprise before this, years ago."

The turnkey's eyes opened wide in admiration.

"But, tell me," continued the priest, "what is the strange odor in this room—is it powder? Has there been a fight? The appearance of the soldiers would indicate it."

"Oh, mere scratches," said a corporal whose arm was swathed in bandages.

"Come, there must be something behind all this. Did you meet the Imperial forces?"

"Imperial soldiers! Bah, they would not dare fight with the King's men."

"*Peste*, who is this audacious enemy who dares to brave the great Cardinal?"

"A man named Cyrano," said the corporal.

"Cy-ra-no!" repeated the priest. "A strange name."

"The man himself is even stranger."

"Indeed! And what have you done with this Cyrano? For I take it for granted that you have triumphed. Is he dead?"

"Dead? *He! Malpeste*, that's impossible!"

"Wounded then?"

"Not even that! He is a devil and has some talisman that wards off all misfortune."

"Escaped?"

"Captured!" interrupted Duretête. "A prisoner in the cellar."

The priest seemed to shudder involuntarily. The jailer's face wore such a horrible look of hate and fear that the chaplain turned his head away in disgust.

"In the cellar!" he repeated rather sarcastically.

"Master Duretête has imprisoned him there for fear he will again escape," grumbled the corporal. "It seems that this Cyrano is an intimate friend of His Majesty, the Devil, and that his infernal patron is always ready to deliver him from prisons!"

This gibe was greeted with raucous laughter by the other soldiers. A spasm seemed to go over the turnkey's face and a half-insane light gleamed in his eyes.

"Silence!" he shouted, crossing himself, and then murmured in a low voice: *"Vade . . . vade retro!"*

A single motion of the priest's hand put an end to the quarrel.

"Master Duretête may be right," he said slowly and solemnly. "The hand of the Devil is always at work here on earth. Haven't you heard of the recent apparitions at Sainte-Baume and the nuns who were possessed at Loudun! Hasn't even Monseigneur de Richelieu himself put the priest

Grandier to the torture for his relations with the Evil One?"

The guards were no longer laughing. A convulsive shudder shook the frame of the jailer. The chaplain looked steadily at the man's livid face, and continued:

"A good Christian like you, Master Duretête, a man who has always remained faithful to the Cardinal, has nothing to fear from Satan."

A pitiful sigh was the poor turnkey's only answer.

"At any rate, if this Cyrano had relations with the Enemy of Mankind, we should soon be able to know, because he would then have supernatural powers and be able to change himself into any shape he liked."

"But he can!" gasped Duretête. "At the Bastille he changed himself into Vauselle!"

"He could do even more than that," continued the Abbé. "If occasion arose he would know how to make gold—even from stones!"

"The Spanish doubloons!" groaned Dame Anastasie's husband.

"And he would have at his command the Legions of Hell!"

"Oh, horrors, the apocalyptical beast at Gentilly!"

"Yes, the Legions of Hell, which he could summon in the dark hours of the night to save him, even if he were enclosed in the most impenetrable prison."

"Please, no more!" exclaimed the jailer, almost fainting. "It is *he!* the Tempter, the Evil One, Satan! Oh, I am lost!"

To add to the ghastliness of the scene, a fierce crash of thunder filled the room. The priest jumped to his feet.

Pointing authoritatively to the door of the cellar, he cried:

"Open that door, Master Duretête! I must speak to this Cyrano. If the man is possessed, he desperately needs the help of religion."

"Are you going to exorcise him?" exclaimed Duretête.

"No, but plead with him and try to redeem his soul."

Dominated by the priest's manner, the trembling turnkey slowly made his way to the improvised prison. But just before opening the door, an instinctive fear seized him. He looked at the stranger suspiciously, mumbling:

"If I open, he will escape!"

The chaplain made an impatient gesture, and advanced as if to push to one side the huge body that barred the entrance to the cellar. But suddenly his usual calm manner and ecclesiastical suavity returned. His eye had just caught sight of the peep-hole in the door.

"Wait, here is a means of communication already prepared," he said. "I can speak to those inside through this opening. This will do very well."

The priest pulled a stool to the door, and climbed upon it, being thus on a level with the peep-hole. He then whistled softly. The jailer looked at him in surprise.

"Leave this to me, Master Duretête," whispered the man of God. "Even if Satan is there, I promise that this Cyrano will listen to me and that I can save him from the clutches of the Enemy."

The guards, amused by the appearance of this soldierly chaplain, and anxious not to lose a word of the sermon, arose and formed a semicircle around him. The priest coughed to clear his voice and then called into the darkness:

"My children, my brothers, do you hear me?"

"Who's there? Who's speaking?" whispered Cyrano, suddenly awakened from a fitful sleep.

Saint-Amant answered by pointing to the light that came through the peep-hole and to the silhouette of the head behind.

"A stranger!"

"A priest!" murmured Linières. "He has a tonsure."

"*Peste!* Must we listen to a sermon!"

The preacher began in a low, insinuating voice:

"Alas, I cannot see you, my friends, but you can hear me and that is enough. Listen carefully to the words of a passing stranger. Heaven has not thrown me in your way without some *secret design.* The message which I bring you is one of comfort, hope, and perhaps even *safety!*"

"Oh, confound him!" grumbled the Gascon.

"He speaks of safety!" announced Linières.

"Keep quiet," whispered the rotund Saint-Amant, in whose hardened heart there still remained a remnant of his early faith.

"You do not know me at all, dear friends," continued the priest, "but *I know you!* Yes, I know everything: your sins, your fights, and your terrible rebellion against the Master—against Him whose all-powerful hand rules even Kings!"

"How strange," murmured Cyrano, now interested. "Of which master is he speaking? God or Richelieu?"

"I know of your relations with *the Spirit of Revolt*, and of the damnable means by which you have been able to abuse a loyal servant of the Most Eminent Cardinal. Great are your sins, my brothers, and deep is the abyss into which

you find yourselves plunged. Your release will be difficult. But the divine mercy is without limit. Listen to me, trust me, and *you will be saved!*"

The preacher paused for a moment. Leaning toward Duretête, he whispered:

"All is well! They are listening to me."

The prisoners looked at one another in amazement.

"Jove, did you hear that?" said Cyrano.

"What an extraordinary sermon! All the words seem to have a double meaning. Where can this priest have dropped from?"

"No matter, let us listen carefully."

The chaplain began again:

"Your safety, my dearest brothers, depends on one thing. You must avoid the road to perdition—that road which has led you to this abyss of misery. Avoid the Evil One who seeks after you, and is now infesting this road. Keep away from the ambushes of the Enemy, my friends. Change your route."

"Change our route?" repeated Cyrano to his friends, trying to find the hidden meaning of these words.

The chaplain hastened to continue:

"Remember the great apostle Paul. He too was wandering in darkness and shadows, but at last he discovered the road to Damascus. Follow his example. You, in turn, must *take the road of Saint Paul.*"

"Zeus!" murmured Saint-Amant. "The road of Saint-Pôl is the Calais road!"

Cyrano shrugged his shoulders:

"Yes, but before we can take the Calais road, we must first get out of this prison!"

"Ah, I feel it, I know," continued the priest excitedly, "you understand me! One idea alone now occupies your hearts: *to save yourselves!* Already your eyes are searching for the method of salvation. It is at hand. Seek and ye shall find, says the Bible."

Cyrano instinctively looked in the direction which seemed to be indicated by the priest. A large bundle of fagots lay again the wall at the back of the cellar.

"A door!" gasped Linières, who had slipped quickly to the place and removed the fagots.

The voice of the priest was again heard:

"Ah, true the opening is narrow, the door low. To pass this door of repentance and contrition you must conquer your pride and bow your heads. Your safety depends on this."

Saint-Amant placed all the strength of his giant body against the low door.

"Bolted and solid!" he whispered.

"*Mordious!*" cursed Cyrano, adding his strength to his friend's. "It won't budge!"

In his annoyance he turned toward the priest. The holy father smiled with an imperturbable assurance.

"*Capédédious*, is he mocking us!"

"Be humble," warned the priest, "and have faith! There is no obstacle that cannot be overcome, no situation so desperate that a remedy cannot be found. No door in the world is so solid that it cannot be opened by *the sublime key* of Faith. Knock and it shall be opened! Pray and you shall be saved! Stretch forth your hand and *the key of safety shall be given* to you."

"Amen!" sighed Master Duretête, crossing himself.

Carried away by the warmth of his sermon, the priest put his hands through the opening as if to give a blessing. In one hand a bright object shone in the darkness. Cyrano rushed forward, and something metallic fell into his outstretched palm.

"A key!" gasped the swordsman.

"Give it to me quickly," whispered Saint-Amant.

"Hallelujah!"

The key had opened the door.

"Savinien, my son," said Saint-Amant sententiously, "the miracle has been accomplished."

"Saved!" murmured Linières triumphantly, as he crawled through the opening, followed by his fat friend.

Cyrano hesitated. He could not take his eyes off the peep-hole where an almost supernatural halo of light surrounded the smiling, enigmatic face of the priest. The chaplain was continuing his sermon, but now his voice thundered. For the edification of Master Duretête he enumerated the torments reserved for hardened sinners. He threatened the prisoners with these punishments if they ever again fell into the hands of the Evil One.

"A complete stranger!" exclaimed Cyrano to himself. "Yes, Saint-Amant is right—this is a miracle!"

As the Gascon in his turn started to crawl through the small door, the priest's hand waved in farewell, and he repeated his former warning:

"The road of Saint-Pôl!"

"Many thanks!" whispered Cyrano.

During this interval, his two companions were hastily saddling three of the soldiers' horses which they had found in a shed. A moment later the three men were on their

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way. Leaving behind them *the road to perdition*—that is, the Boulogne road which the cowardly Vauselle had taken—they galloped furiously toward *the road to safety* which led by way of Saint-Pôl to Calais.

On opening his eyes the next morning d'Artagnan was amazed to find himself between the sheets of a soft bed. He had forgotten the events of the previous evening.

"What time is it?" he murmured.

A soft voice answered:

"Nine o'clock!"

D'Artagnan sat up hastily and discovered that he was face to face with the corpulent Bazin.

"Devil take Aramis! Where can he still be?"

"The worthy father is at the barracks, but he will not be long. He begs you to breakfast well."

D'Artagnan was seated at table when Aramis reappeared. The priest was already fully equipped for an expedition. His clerical dress had given place to a most cavalier costume. The confident look in his eyes seemed to be auspicious. But the one thing that particularly attracted the Musketeer's attention was his friend's boots. They were of superb workmanship, with handsome leather flaps and delicate silver spurs. Yet there was also another more striking peculiarity. Although the day was fine, the boots were very muddy, as if their wearer had made a long trip over rain-soaked roads.

"Well," said Aramis, shaking his friend's hand, "did you have a good night? Were you able to sleep through the storm?"

"Yes, thank you. And you?"

"Oh, I couldn't close my eyes all night."

"Illness?"

"No, work."

"I see," said d'Artagnan slyly, looking at his friend's feet, "you must have read a great deal."

"What!"

"Yes, you have bravely ploughed through the *Casuistry* of the reverend Jesuit fathers. A wonderful science, but rather muddy at times!"

"What do you mean?"

"Zounds, haven't you worked so hard that even your boots have been affected?"

The priest flushed, and winked warningly in the direction of Bazin who was not missing a word of this singular dialogue.

"Silence!"

"True," he murmured, "I almost forgot. Aramis is 'the silent guide.' I must become accustomed to his new rôle."

The priest turned to his servant, grumbling:

"*Corbleu*—I mean, God's mercy, aren't you ready yet?"

"I've almost finished, sir," sighed Bazin, struggling to close a bulging portmanteau.

"I hope you haven't forgotten anything. Do you have the harquebuse and the ointment for wounds?"

"Oh, yes, sir—and also your breviary and beads."

"And my pistols?"

"In their holsters."

"And the Valenciennes lace?"

"I put it between the pages of the *Casuistry* so that it would not become rumpled."

"Ah, the good thing about Bazin is that he remembers everything," said Aramis when his servant had left with the portmanteau. "And here, d'Artagnan, is your passport, duly stamped. We can leave as soon as you like."

"The sooner the better!"

"To horse, then!"

The Musketeer followed his laconic friend from the room. Three horses awaited them in the courtyard. The faithful servant was strapping the precious portmanteau to the saddle. The soldier-priest leaped upon his horse, and without a word led the way at a trot. D'Artagnan followed behind him. The placid Bazin, having climbed upon his mount, brought up the rear.

The road, though showing signs of the storm of the previous night, was now quite dry. The air was crisp, and the envoy of the great Cardinal and of the Queen felt a sudden exhilaration. His worries, like the tempest, had passed with the coming of a new day. His recent adventures seemed far away, and he felt that he was now commencing a new chapter in his life. He had gone back ten years, and was once again riding in the steps of his beloved Aramis! The Musketeer shrugged his shoulders as he remembered the misunderstanding that had almost separated them.

"We acted like children," he muttered to himself. "What nonsense we talked, when we said our youth was a thing of the past. Why, *mordi*, I have an idea that it is about to recommence!"

Although he was quite reconciled to the enforced pact of silence with his new companion, one thought kept disturbing him: where were they going? On leaving the

village, d'Artagnan noticed that his guide took the Arras road. But that meant little. A vast number of roads crossed and spread out in every direction from Arras. Some went directly across Artois toward Pas-du-Calais; others reached the sea at Flanders by more oblique routes. Since they were in such haste to reach England, the scene of their future actions, d'Artagnan took it for granted that they would try to gain the Channel by the shortest way.

"Yes, *parbleu*," he said to himself, "we are heading for Calais. It is the direct route. A straight line is the shortest distance between two points."

He had just reached this conclusion when he saw Aramis stop and motion him to approach.

"Well," he muttered, hastening to bridge the gap between them, "I'll know at last."

But his joyous exuberance disappeared after one look at his friend's face. The Abbé was worried. His knitted brows and perplexed manner showed that he was in the midst of a difficult decision. For once in his life Aramis had trouble in making up his mind.

CHAPTER VII

THE SHORTEST ROAD

"My dear fellow," he said, making sure that Bazin was out of ear-shot, "the time has come for a little talk about our affairs. Yesterday evening, under the influence of a perfectly natural emotion, we touched only lightly upon certain delicate matters. A few points are still not clear, and I am rather at a loss as to how to act."

"Question me, please. You have only to ask and I will enlighten you to the best of my ability."

"With certain reservations that concern our respective secrets!"

"Yes, of course," smiled d'Artagnan. "And yet we are not altogether on the same footing even there. You are too clever, Aramis, not to have discovered the secret of my mission—it is an open book to you. Whereas I know nothing about . . ."

"Shh! Remember our agreement."

"Yes, certainly! You are 'the silent guide.' Still, it seems to me that a few words of information from you would not be amiss. For instance, where are we now going?"

"The point is well taken," said the priest, pointing

to the place on the horizon where the walls of a fortified city could be dimly seen. "We are on our way to Arras."

"Splendid, first to Arras. And then?"

"Then?" repeated Aramis, again allowing an anxious look to appear on his face.

"Yes, then?" insisted d'Artagnan.

His friend paid no attention to this question, but, instead, said:

"Yesterday you made covert allusions to a person whose name could not be mentioned."

"Always shifting!" thought the Musketeer, vexed by this manœuvre. "You're not going to pretend you haven't guessed the name of that person!"

The Abbé continued:

"Without being indiscreet, may I ask you if that person, in entrusting to you the protection of the youth who escaped from the Bastille, did not give you some details as to his history?"

"I don't quite understand."

"I shall be more precise. Did the 'lady,' whom we shall not mention by name in order to keep our agreement, know that the Cavalier was going to England?"

"*Parbleu!*" exclaimed d'Artagnan, biting his lips as he suddenly remembered the secret message that Tancrède bore.

"It's exactly as I thought! *She* too is ignorant of the danger."

"Well, wasn't it perfectly logical to send the fugitive to a place where he would find powerful protectors? Lord Montague is a close friend of King Charles and . . ."

"The Duchess of Chevreuse," completed the priest with a mysterious smile.

The conversation had taken such a turn that the Musketeer realized that once again his friend, without any apparent effort and without revealing anything, was slowly extracting the information he desired. This was annoying beyond words—true Gascons did not like to be made fools of.

"Listen to me," he said abruptly. "I prefer to tell all you want to know, of my own volition. The question now centres around a person—a 'lady' or whatever else you wish to call her, *mordi!* You ask what she has told me concerning the Cavalier. Very well. She told me all she knew. And that 'all' is very little, as you will soon see. And this 'all' she has only learned recently in an entirely accidental manner."

Lowering his voice and approaching nearer to his comrade, he continued:

"Yes, it was just by chance that she discovered that Lord Buckingham's young son, whom she believed alive under an assumed name in some Scotch castle, had disappeared following his father's assassination."

"Thirteen years ago!"

"Exactly! The child was three years old at the time, and consequently should be sixteen now. This disappearance seemed to be an impenetrable mystery. One man alone could have solved it: the trusted servant to whom the dying Duke had confided his son. Well, this faithful valet, an Irishman called Patrick O'Brien . . ."

"Has also disappeared!" concluded the Abbé, with a strange light in his eyes.

"Yes, and since that time no trace of him! Silence and forgetfulness! Then suddenly came an extraordinary event—the child whom all had thought dead reappeared! How? You know better than I, Aramis. But, alas, the servant did not return. Patrick is lost forever."

D'Artagnan paused to see what effect his words were having. Aramis, lost in reflection, looked vaguely into the distance. Finally his lips moved slowly as he said:

"Do they know where Patrick went when he escaped from London with his precious charge?"

"No. Scotland, probably."

"Have they mentioned no other place?"

"None!"

The Musketeer seized with a sudden suspicion, scrutinized the priest. But his friend had resumed his customary calm.

"Thank heaven!" he murmured. "They are still ignorant."

This relapse into silence was far from pleasing to d'Artagnan, who at once said rather warmly:

"After all, my dear fellow, what does the Cavalier have to fear? He is now in England under the protection of a trusted adviser of Charles I."

"Lord Buckingham was also a favorite of that King."

D'Artagnan shuddered at that sinister memory.

"Bah, Tancrède has something far more valuable than royal favor to protect him from his enemies—the loyal swords of three brave men, of whom one is worth a hundred ordinary mortals."

"Bergerac?" asked the priest, in hypocritical astonishment. "Well, well, I thought he was locked in a cellar."

"Something tells me that he has been able to escape."

"Eh, who told you that?"

"Your boots, you rascal!" answered d'Artagnan, extending his hand warmly.

The Abbé pressed it, murmuring:

"Oh, you never know in this world."

"Zounds, I like that fiery poet. Once free, he will not have wasted a second. He realized that his friend was in danger, and probably took the shortest route to England."

"Hmm, perhaps the road through Saint-Pôl?"

"That or some other. He should now be on his way to Dover. Tomorrow he will have rejoined the Cavalier."

The priest hesitated a moment, and then said in a rather cold voice:

"And does this Bergerac know the secret of that enigma of which you yourself are ignorant?"

"*Jarni,*" cursed the Musketeer, "he knows even less than I."

The pitiless priest nodded sagely, adding:

"Besides, your friend is not the first person to cross the Channel ahead of us."

"Who then?"

"Monsieur de Vauselle."

"Very true! He left yesterday afternoon for Boulogne and will have reached England by this time."

"Didn't you tell me that he had been engaged in some affair connected with Madame de Chevreuse?"

"He was her messenger, but was bought over by the Cardinal."

"Hmm, perhaps the intriguing Duchess does not know

that. Wasn't the rascal clever enough to have himself incarcerated in the Bastille?"

"Yes; and he will now appear before her with the halo of a martyr!"

"Of course! And consequently he will be able to lay a clever, destructive mine underneath the Cavalier's feet and blow him and his friends to pieces."

"Good God, what a terrible situation! Tancrède's friends either duped or impotent! His enemies, open or hidden, on every side. Poor Cavalier! Ah, *corbac*, Aramis, you will end by frightening me. And, word of a Gascon, I've just remembered something else. Day before yesterday, on leaving Paris, I had a strange meeting. . . . Yes, *parbleu!* . . . She was stopped at the gate, but the delay could not have been long. Her carriage was speedy and she was armed with an official order from His Eminence. She was in a most devilish hurry!"

This time it was the Abbé's turn to be surprised. He looked anxiously at his friend who, while uttering these conjectures, had become more and more agitated. D'Artagnan did not notice Aramis' interest, but continued:

"Another enemy is ahead of us. And I fear her more than the others. The weakness that attaches from her being a woman does not make her less formidable than all the brutal agents of the Cardinal, his Vauselles and Duretêtes."

"A woman? I felt that this revelation would be forthcoming. What is her name?"

"She is a human tigress. Her name is Daisy, Countess of Suttland."

Aramis was now as pale as a sheet. D'Artagnan spurred

on his animal as if to make up for lost time. During this swift dialogue, the riders had reached the gate of Arras. They went straight to the leading tavern, which was also a relay post. While the grooms were tending the horses, the two friends ate a substantial meal in silence. The chaplain was disturbed, the Musketeer impatient. The third member of the group, Bazin, had disappeared on some confidential errand for his master. He soon returned, acting in a mysterious, important manner. Approaching close to the Abbé, he whispered several words to him.

"D'Artagnan," announced Aramis, "you were not deceived. Yesterday afternoon a woman in a post-chaise, armed with an order from the Cardinal, stopped here to obtain four fresh horses."

"A blond lady with a marked English accent," added the servant. "She must have been a great lady, because the groom recognized an earl's coronet on the carriage."

"*Sangodemi*, it's she!" cried d'Artagnan, jumping to his feet.

"The woman left at once for Calais."

"Forward, at a gallop!"

The Abbé politely but firmly stopped his friend.

"Where will you go?"

"To England! *Corbac*, a straight line is the shortest distance between two points."

"You think so?"

This question left d'Artagnan speechless with rage.

"Keep your head, dear friend. Let us, if you please, reflect a bit. According to you, our route should be . . . ?"

"Through Artois, *parbleu!*"

"*Parbleu!*" repeated the clever Casuist, nodding his head. "You mean, '*parbleu, yes,*' I suppose. Well, I'll tell you a secret. I thought the same thing a short while ago. But now I am convinced of the contrary."

The Musketeer looked at his friend incredulously. Had the Abbé's subtle clear mind suddenly given way?

"Don't worry," said Aramis calmly as he read the Lieutenant's mind. "The shortest road lies through Flanders and that is the one we will take!"

With these words the Abbé arose, buckled on his belt resolutely, and sprang into the saddle.

"Confound it, where is he taking me!" grumbled the Musketeer.

While the unctuous Bazin held d'Artagnan's stirrup, he murmured in his deep voice:

"You know Monsieur l'Abbé's way. With him one knows where he is going . . . after he has arrived!"

The journey was now continued in silence. Aramis kept a steady pace. Swiftly they covered the ten leagues that separated Lille from Arras. They made a short stop at the *Flemish Inn* at Lille, and then continued at increased speed. Although alarmed at first, d'Artagnan was beginning to feel reassured. At this rate they could reach one of the northern ports before evening—Gravelines or Dunkerque. After all the detour was slight and would not cause a serious delay. And, even more important, Aramis seemed to be in a great hurry to arrive at his destination; he no longer showed any signs of uncertainty.

"Ah, he has his own shrewd plans," thought the Musketeer.

They were soon at Ypres. The grey sky outlined the

feudal walls with their slender, slate-covered towers. The church clocks struck four. By continuing straight toward Berg-Saint-Vinox they should be in Dunkerque in a few hours. But the Musketeer nearly dropped with surprise when, on leaving Ypres, he saw his guide forsake the highway and turn into a wretched country road. There could no longer be any doubt: Aramis was not heading for the coast; he was not leading his companion to England! But where were they going? Yes, *where?* D'Artagnan, carried away with impatience, rushed forward to join his mad guide.

"Is this still the shortest route?"

"Obviously!"

"Strange, to say the least! We are going away from the sea."

"Quite likely!"

"Well, *sandi*, you can at any rate tell me the name of the place where we are going!"

"No, our agreement forbids that!"

"*Corbac!*"

The priest pressed his friend's hand.

"This evening, d'Artagnan, you will know our destination. You can then decide for yourself what we are to do."

"Thank God for that! However, in the meantime?"

"Silence!"

The Musketeer chewed the ends of his mustache furiously. But he felt that any further questioning would be useless, and that he must resign himself to fate and to his guide.

"Oh, *sangodemi,*" he groaned, raising his hands to heaven with a hopeless gesture, "what a predicament!

Monsieur de Bergerac would have a good laugh if he could see me thus led by the nose!"

No longer having any excuse for talking to his friend, d'Artagnan kept his lips firmly shut. He did not even try now to divine the Abbé's plans, but followed as docilely as a child. Their route lay over rough roads that often turned into mere foot-paths. They passed a labyrinth of villages so nearly similar that the Musketeer had the impression of going in a circle. An endless series of canals was crossed on tottering bridges. Finally, toward evening, the horsemen approached a small village whose brick houses were reflected in the sluggish water of the long canals.

"My friend," suggested the Abbé courteously, "it is already dusk. If the idea is agreeable to you, shall we stop here?"

"Just as you say," answered d'Artagnan. "But our horses are fresh and can still go some little distance."

This remark was not noticed, or at least acted upon, by Aramis who quickly dismounted and gave the reins to Bazin. The Musketeer had no choice but to follow.

"This inn," explained the guide, "seems to be quite a perfect place. If you are willing, Bazin can stable our horses here and arrange for bed and supper."

The Musketeer's complete resignation was almost pathetic.

"Quite!" he said.

The soldierly priest drew nearer to the inn to read the sign.

"In het vlaamschvoss!"

"Which means?"

"At the Sign of the Flemish Fox."

"Zounds, you even know Flemish!" exclaimed the amazed Musketeer.

"Do you object?"

With this rather unkind remark, Aramis put his hand in his friend's arm and drew him along by his side.

"Oh, confound it, where are we going now?"

"Just a few steps, if you don't mind, while they are preparing supper. What a pleasant peacefulness fills this hamlet, with its clean, trim houses. How wonderful to live so far away from the turmoil of the world! Look at the multitude of lights in the windows, and at their reflection in the tranquil water. There is an atmosphere here of family life and complete concord. Can't you see these people working in their gardens and raising happy children?"

D'Artagnan's eyes were wide open in surprise. What did this mocking idyllic description mean?

"And look, my dear friend, at those two old men sitting quietly on that stone bench. What can they be thinking of while they smoke their pipes?"

The Musketeer was about to answer that nothing in the world interested him less than the thoughts of old Flemish men, when, to his amazement, he saw his aristocratic friend slip to the end of the bench, sit down, and say:

"*Gooten dag!*"

Good heavens, what new madness now! D'Artagnan remained where he was, realizing the futility of trying to join in the conversation on which Aramis had at once embarked. He heard several vague, meaningless sentences. The Abbé seemed to pay no attention to his friend. He opened the conversation with several general observations

on the weather, to which the smokers replied in the flat, guttural Flemish tongue. But gradually the discussion became more animated. From the tones of their voices it seemed that the chaplain was asking questions and that the men were answering excitedly, sometimes both speaking at the same time. D'Artagnan could see them gesticulate and then point to some distant object on the horizon.

What in the devil was this nonsense! And what could the handsome priest have in common with these stodgy Flemings whose very clothes gave off the stale smell of tobacco and dirt? Suddenly the annoyed Musketeer straightened up. One of the old men had pronounced a name—only two syllables in a foreign language, but that language was not Flemish.

"Come, d'Artagnan!"

Aramis had left his new friends, and taking his companion's arm, led him away. This time it was not necessary to urge the Musketeer. Without a question, he accompanied his silent guide. They advanced rapidly in the direction toward which the smokers had pointed. On the outskirts of the village they climbed a narrow steep path to a little plateau.

There they suddenly found themselves before a house, or rather, we should say, a pile of ruins. All that remained of the edifice was the line of gaunt walls; the roof had fallen in. The house had apparently been destroyed by fire but it was obvious that this had happened many years before and that it had not been inhabited since that time. This sinister sight produced a strange emotion in the Musketeer's heart. He felt that he was in one of those

cursed places—the scene of some old crime—from which people flee with horror for fear of ghosts.

"D'Artagnan," said Aramis in a low voice, "do you know what house this is?"

"Isn't it the one about which you were talking with the old men?"

"Yes, and they told me its history. It is a weird and terrible history, my friend. Thirteen years ago . . ."

"Thirteen years!"

"This place served as a refuge for a stranger—a man from somewhere across the sea, they thought. He lived alone with a young child whom he watched over with the greatest care and whom he never left, day or night."

"A three-year-old child?"

"Let me continue. At this period Flanders was frequently ravaged by bands of soldiers. One night the village was awakened by cries. Red flames lit up the sky. Fire! Crowds rushed to the scene. Finally the fire was extinguished and they were able to enter the house. In the midst of the smoking débris lay a man."

"Dead?"

"No, although he had been severely wounded. God had destined him for some mysterious mission; he made a miraculous recovery."

"Alive! He lives!" cried d'Artagnan.

"Yes. But the child could not be found. The brigands, after attacking the man and pillaging the furnishings and setting fire to the house, had carried the poor child away with them."

"Alas! But he, the stranger?"

"As soon as he had recovered, he left in search of the child. He has not been seen since then."

"Are you speaking, gentlemen, of Patrick O'Breane or O'Brien?" asked a voice.

The two friends shuddered. Behind them in the shadow, someone, whose approach they had not noticed, stood looking at them. D'Artagnan instinctively put his hand upon the hilt of his sword.

"I am Master Van Heybrock, Imperial and Royal Notary of this town," said the newcomer. "I have been informed that two French gentlemen had arrived at *The Flemish Fox* and that they were seeking information about this ancient affair. Expecting to find you at this spot, I have hastened here at once."

The notary stopped to mop his face. He was a very corpulent man and the walk had caused him to perspire.

"This gentleman is the Count d'Artagnan," said Aramis, making a sign to the Musketeer not to be surprised at anything. "He is a friend of Lord Montague and has, in fact, been entrusted with a mission in connection with this Patrick."

"Oh, I was sure of it, gentlemen. Men of my profession have a second sense in things like this. There's no use continuing your investigations in these ruins. They have been abandoned since the fire and you will be unable to find anything. The centre of the mystery is elsewhere."

"Where then?" asked d'Artagnan.

The corpulent gentleman winked his eyes slyly.

"At my house, in my office. I was an intimate friend of Patrick. The gallant fellow had a presentiment of the

danger. He kept thinking that he was going to be robbed or killed—and all the rest."

The two companions exchanged a significant look in the shadow.

"He was very wise, for the precious papers in his possession could not be found by the brigands. They rest safely in my archives—where you may see them."

"Oh, Monsieur, let us go at once."

"Yes, you can see them carefully sealed in a large envelope," continued the imperial and royal officer.

The Musketeer, vexed, bit his lips.

"In a sealed envelope," repeated the notary, "which cannot be opened until after the passing of thirteen years."

"Thirteen years! Why, then, the time has expired!"

"No, not for three days."

D'Artagnan uttered a low expression of disgust at these stupid formalities which seemed to amuse the officer so greatly.

"Well, in three days, then, the envelope may be opened?"

"In the presence of four witnesses, who are to swear as to the contents of the envelope."

"May we assist at this ceremony?"

"Yes, sir,—always provided that . . ."

"Provided that? . . . What, *cordi*, what?"

"Provided that before that time Patrick O'Breane or O'Brien has not reappeared!" concluded Master Van Heybrock.

The Musketeer shrugged his shoulders at this absurd suggestion. He then engaged in a rapid conversation with Aramis who had not said a word since the opening of the scene.

"Well, what are we to do?"

"You must decide yourself."

"*Mordi*, we'll stay here then! Now that we finally have the key to the enigma we won't take a chance on losing it."

"Don't you think that this will delay us?" asked the priest in his most innocent manner.

"Ah, Aramis, you were right. A straight line is by no means the shortest route from one point to another!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE FOUR PRECEPTS OF OLIVER CROMWELL

We must now return to the Mysterious Cavalier. What has happened to him during all these exciting events, of which he was the prime cause? After leaving his companions at the cross-roads, the intrepid youth followed the Saint-Valéry highway across the dunes. This separation which Cyrano had forced on him quite broke his heart. A score of times he was on the point of turning back, but one thought restrained him. Did he, Anne of Austria's messenger, have the right to endanger his royal mistress's secrets by any unnecessary rashness?

Tancrède, of course, had no idea of his friend's real plans. He thought that the Gascon would attempt an escape, and, in that case, a fourth person would be only a hindrance. Accordingly, the best thing he could do was to put the twenty leagues of the English Channel between him and his pursuers.

It was about noon when the Cavalier reached Saint-Valéry. A dozen boats lay idly on the beach at the estuary of the Somme waiting for the tide to turn. Tancrède began at once to look for a means of transportation. He could offer a good price and expected no difficulty in finding a boat to carry him across the Channel. But he suffered a cruel disillusionment. None of these little vessels, all of

which were engaged in fishing along the coast, dared to face the dangers of a crossing. The Cavalier could make no impression upon their owners, in spite of the purse which Cyrano had thoughtfully given to him. The worthy people of Saint-Valéry were not, it is true, suspicious of Spanish doubloons; but they set a higher value on their boats and, particularly, on their skins.

The only result of the youth's conferences was to attract an uncomfortable amount of attention. The fishermen began to wonder about the identity of this young cavalier, so well supplied with money, and to ask why he was so anxious to leave the soil of France. The situation was fast becoming serious. The precious minutes that Cyrano had promised him were passing swiftly. The disconsolate young man sat on the embankment and saw one boat after another take advantage of the rising tide; sails were quickly set and the vessels soon disappeared from sight as they ploughed their way through the billowy seas.

Evening was at hand. A strong wind began to blow up the white-caps. Heavy, dark clouds gathered threateningly on the horizon. But Tancrède paid no attention to the weather. He mounted again and galloped furiously along the beach in the direction of Cayeux. One thought filled his mind:

"A boat—I must find a boat before night!"

Suddenly he saw a lugger riding at anchor in a small, protected cove. The movements of the men on board pointed to immediate departure. The Cavalier could see the captain, a short thickset man with a flaming face. The commands he gave for casting off were accompanied by volleys of violent oaths.

The appearance of the vessel itself would probably have brought a scowl to the face of the prudent Saint-Amant. It was an unholy-looking affair with twisted rigging and a hull that had been repaired so often that little of the original shell was left. But our friend wasted no time on such considerations; after all, what should a soldier know about nautical matters? He called the captain. A bargain was soon concluded; the sight of the magic doubloons smoothed over all difficulties. An hour later the Mysterious Cavalier had the great satisfaction of seeing the Picardy coast disappear in the distance. It was high time. The lugger had just rounded the Crotoy point when a troop of horsemen rode furiously down to the beach. The old officer and His Eminence's guards had arrived too late.

The first part of the crossing was without incident. The captain, heavy and slow, a typical specimen of the Picardy race, drank vast quantities of wine to keep up his spirits. Although the wind began to blow more and more strongly he did not exhibit the slightest sign of anxiety. But toward midnight conditions suddenly changed. This was about the time, it will be remembered, that the noise of the great storm had disturbed d'Artagnan in his sleep, Aramis in his "casuistical" expedition, and even the impossible Duretête in his improvised prison.

In a few minutes the storm broke. The sea became a seething whirling caldron. The lugger was lost between mountainous waves, each one of which seemed certain to destroy the helpless vessel. Nothing could be seen but bounding seas and flashes of lightning. The noise was terrific—the groaning of timbers, the whistling of the tempest, and the crashing of thunder all joined to produce an infernal

uproar. This dangerous situation lasted till dawn, which finally appeared, mournful and grey. The captain was forced to admit that, considering the condition of his boat, it would be necessary to regain the French coast, from which they could not be far distant. Since the storm had blown from the west, the vessel was probably less than half way across the Channel. Their position lay in the middle of the lane followed by ships engaged in commerce between France and England. By drifting in the lane, they might be able to meet one of these ships.

Shortly before eleven o'clock Tancrède found himself safely installed on a brig, carrying the English flag, which was on its way to the Low Countries. It had been arranged that the brig should go out of its course to deposit the young man in England. The Cavalier, showing unusual prudence and wishing to avoid the embarrassment of an official debarkation, had insisted that he be not landed until evening and that some lonely spot be chosen. The English captain agreed to this without allowing the slightest sign of surprise to appear on his face.

"All right," he answered in a loud voice. "To England!"

Toward evening they came in sight of shore.

"Portsmouth!" said the phlegmatic captain.

The brig entered the channel near the Isle of Wight, but instead of continuing in that direction, the captain headed for the island of Hayling and then hove to. A small boat was hailed, and the Cavalier, after bidding farewell to the captain, began to descend a rope ladder on the starboard side. This operation did not pass unobserved. It first awakened the curiosity of the rough group that hung around

the embankment waiting for passengers whom they might serve. And soon the port authorities began to grow suspicious. But fortunately, at that distance the worthy officials could only wave their arms and swear vigorously.

At this very moment the Boulogne packet made its appearance. The narrowness of the Channel forced the larger boat to pass close to the brig, and it was quite easy for the curious to distinguish faces. Among the many pairs of eyes that watched the Cavalier dangling precariously at the end of his ladder, there was one pair that exhibited in rapid succession signs of amazement, curiosity, and finally, supreme satisfaction.

"What is the name of the little town there, toward which that boat seems to be heading?" asked the owner of the eloquent eyes, pointing to the skiff in which the Cavalier was departing.

"Chichester," replied a sailor.

"Can one reach London directly from there?"

"No, it's necessary to go to Brighton to find a stage."

"Is Brighton far away?"

"Twenty miles."

"Thank you!" said the inquisitive passenger, adding in a low tone: "*Diavolo*, I have come in time."

Leaving the row-boat, the Cavalier walked quickly toward the nearest town, which was in fact Chichester. From there a road parallel with the coast led to Brighton. Brighton, it will be remembered, was the place designated by Cyrano for their meeting; the Cavalier was to wait for him until the following Saturday.

Now that he was at last in England, Tancrède was rich in hope alone. His baggage was not exactly cumbersome

as it consisted of just three objects: his hat, containing the message destined for the Duchess of Chevreuse; his sword dangling about his ankles; and his purse, or rather, what was left of Cyrano's purse after the two captains had made their raids on it. There was still enough money to carry him to London; his sword was still long enough to instil respect; and as for Anne of Austria's message—well, by his Star, our friend expected at least a fortune from it! But in the meantime he must walk, for *Stello* had been left behind at Saint-Valéry and he had no money with which to buy another mount.

Tancrède advanced at a steady pace, whistling a military tune. He had walked five or six miles without meeting a soul when the silence was suddenly broken by the sound of wheels and the jangling of bells. A carriage entered the highway from a side-road a few yards in front of the pedestrian. Calling to mind all the English he knew, the Cavalier advanced to the carriage and said:

"Good evening, Sir, is this the good way to Brighton?"

Instead of the expected answer, he saw two piercing eyes scrutinizing him from the interior of the carriage. Finally a voice answered slowly in French:

"You are mistaken, sir. This road does, indeed, lead to the place you mentioned, but it is the *bad* road."

"Good or bad, it makes no difference," said the Cavalier. "We have in my country a proverb that all roads lead to Rome."

A violent fit of coughing greeted this remark, followed by a muttered imprecation, the only part which Tancrède could distinguish being the word "Babylon."

"Have I fallen in with one of those 'Puritans' of whom

Cyrano spoke?" he thought. "What a mistake to have mentioned the abhorred name of Rome. *Parbleu*, he's started off as if the devils in hell were chasing him."

The strange driver had struck his horse a smart blow with the whip and, without another word, continued on his way. But the carriage itself seemed to be more sensitive, for the Cavalier saw it stop, as if conscience-stricken, after going only a few yards.

"Young man," said the stranger in a solemn voice, "step in, I beg you. It is written in the Book: 'If you meet on your way a lost sheep, lead him back to the fold.' Enter, my friend. I am going to Brighton and will be pleased to take you there."

In spite of the strangeness of the invitation Tancrède did not wait for it to be repeated. In a second he had taken the seat next to the reciter of Scripture. The carriage once again started on its way. The Cavalier stealthily examined his companion. He was a man of large powerful build; the face was heavy and somewhat bloated; a red nose, covered with warts, occupied the greater part of the face. A bright scarlet cloth around his neck completed the vigorous ensemble of fiery colors found in this extraordinary person. His age was hard to guess, but he seemed to be slightly over forty. His austere dark clothing gave him the appearance of one of the lesser country gentry. His hair was cut short in the manner of the Puritans.

Tancrède's tongue was not naturally a silent one, but he remembered only too well his previous failure and did not wish to risk a second attempt. It was the Puritan who finally broke the silence. He knew France and Paris well, and had just paid a visit to the famous capital. He asked

several questions which the young man found it most difficult to answer. The stranger was interested in things and people so entirely unknown to Tancrède that he might as well have been talking about the moon. The Puritan spoke of financiers, of new methods of manufacturing tapestry, of the management of mills, of learned societies, and of a botanical garden of medicinal plants.

What splendid subjects of conversation for a man of the sword! If only he had been asked what was the best "academy" in which to learn the gentle art of fencing, or where one could fight a duel in safety in spite of the recent edicts, why, then, zounds, he would have been at home. But what replies was he to make to these silly questions? His evident embarrassment seemed to amuse his companion.

"A great country, France," he remarked. "It is full of a spirit which is not altogether appreciated. If only it could rid itself of certain parasites that are sucking its life's blood—ah, then we should see! A certain Cardinal is already putting the axe to the tree of privilege."

Without altogether understanding the meaning of this prophecy, Tancrède felt himself blush violently. The stranger reached the height of his enthusiasm with the remark:

"And to finish this task, there lies in still obscurity a certain priest, very humble, very insignificant, who will one day act as a powerful champion."

"Of whom are you speaking?"

"Ha, of the priest Mazarin and his Master! You seem to know them, young man."

"Sir," replied the soldier with spirit and raising his head proudly, "in France we know only one Master: the King!"

These words caused a terrible transformation in the Puritan. Again the spasm of coughing seized him. Tancrède had the uncomfortable feeling that the man's powerful hands might seize him by the throat at any moment; he already imagined the graceful curve that he would describe in the air as he was ejected from the carriage. But, with a tremendous effort, the stranger mastered this fit of anger; his lips muttered the words of a psalm, and he then relapsed into gloomy silence.

Their journey continued thus until they reached Brighton. Just as the carriage was entering the city the stranger turned to Tancrède. His face had regained its usual serenity and a twinkle even appeared in his eyes.

"My friend," he said, "you are a Frenchman and, of course, a gentleman. This double recommendation means that you must be a swordsman, a gambler, a controversialist, and a gallant. Those four qualities are most admired on the other side of the Channel; here, any one of them would be enough to send a man to prison—or *to his fathers*."

"Ye Gods," thought Tancrède, "he's a Presbyterian and is going to preach me a sermon."

"Believe me when I say the following advice is good: *Primo*, keep your sword in your scabbard if you wish to remain at liberty; *secundo*, don't gamble if you value your purse; *tertio*, argue about neither religion nor politics if you value your life; *quarto*, and most important of all, keep away from women—it is through Eve that Evil has entered this world."

In a more propitiatory manner, the Cavalier said:

"Thank you very much. May I ask to whom I owe this most excellent advice?"

"My name is Oliver Cromwell."

This name, pronounced a few years later, would have filled the hearer, according to the circumstances, with admiration, fright, or horror. But at this time it was only that of an obscure member of Parliament, who was preparing in the shadows his dazzling future.

The Cavalier bowed gracefully, saying quietly:

"I am called the Cavalier Tancrède."

After which he walked away in search of a lodging.

On awakening the next morning, his first care was to repair the damage caused to his one and only suit of clothes by two days' riding and the thirty-six hours of crossing the Channel. With the help of a needle and thread, and a pair of curling-irons borrowed from the chamber-maid, he had soon restored to his clothes their usual elegant appearance and had replaced the swaggering plume to his hat. Finally, combing carefully his light wavy hair, he was ready to venture forth into the city.

Thus equipped, he was again the handsome attractive cavalier. He walked slowly toward the baths which were the centre of fashion and elegance at Brighton, while more than one glance from alluring eyes seemed to warn him that the fair sex in this country was not too hostile toward him. But he was careful to make no response to these pleasant advances. He held in mind the wise, paternal advice of Oliver Cromwell!

It was now only Thursday, and in accordance with Cyrano's instructions, Tancrède must remain in Brighton until Saturday evening to await the outcome of his friend's activities. He had three days to pass—three days in which he had sworn to remain prudent.

While lounging about the baths with the self-assurance of a native, his alert eye was not slow to make observations. One thing struck him particularly. In spite of the early hour, a veritable mob was already crowding about the baths. It was a strangely conglomerate assembly in which two different types of persons seemed to mix; on the one hand, the working people, and on the other those who had come for pleasure and who were now issuing forth from their palatial hotels. The mixing of the two elements took place without any confusion. The working people went their way quietly but energetically, apparently unconscious of the presence of the leisured class. The chair of the professional beauty on its way to the baths caused no confusion in the crowd; the people stepped to one side to give it passage, but did not pay the slightest attention to it.

Tancrède, accustomed to the noisy restless crowds of Paris, could scarcely believe his eyes. And the most amazing thing of all was that this mutual lack of interest was as free from arrogance on the one hand as it was from servility on the other. The humblest seaman in his rough clothes or the porter staggering under a heavy burden had a certain proud look in the eye that commanded respect.

"By my Star, that Monsieur Cromwell is wisdom personified. *Peste!* It would not pay to pick a fight with these powerful rascals. In spite of their calm air and peaceful expression, they look as if they would stand for no nonsense! And yet what admirable serenity!

"See, there's a carriage descending that steep street. It is now in the midst of the crowd. The coachman can hardly hold the horses back . . . Oh, *mordieu*, I was afraid of that!"

A sudden lurch of the equipage had caused this last exclamation of the Cavalier's. Although they too were English, the horses had endured this difficult descent with little patience. The noble animals, excited by the swiftness of their pace and now feeling themselves hemmed in on every side, had broken loose with a sudden dash forward. A sharp cry came from a panic-stricken woman in the throng. At once the spirit of the crowd changed, and the elegant carriage was surrounded on every side by a threatening mob. A man rushed forward, a "bully" with bare arms and blood-stained apron, and seized the horses by the nostrils.

The pale face of a woman appeared at the carriage door. Her eyes searched rapidly through the crowd; she saw nothing but furious, belligerent faces looking back at her. She then looked beyond, as if begging for help. Her beautiful eyes, made even more eloquent by fear, met those of the Cavalier. There was such mute pathos in that look that the young man felt dizzy. Rushing forward, he first bowed courteously to the terrified woman in order to reassure her, and then forced his way through the crowd.

"Let go of those horses!" he cried to the butcher.

And turning to the threatening populace, he said:

"Are you not ashamed to stop a lady in this manner? If any one is injured, let him come forward and receive proper recompense."

Carried away by indignation, Tancrède pronounced this harangue in French, which probably destroyed what effectiveness it might have had. At any rate, the only result of his words was to turn the popular feeling strongly against him. He saw himself surrounded by some thirty men who displayed a sort of bull-dog ferocity and who

began to insult him before attacking. Leaving them to bark to their hearts' content, he turned to the butcher who still held the horses' bits.

"Didn't you understand?" he repeated in English. "Let go of those horses!"

The butcher shrugged his broad athletic shoulders in such an insulting manner that Tancrède's hand flew to the handle of his sword.

"Damn you," shouted the bully, "we're not in France here! This is a man's country and we settle our quarrels with this . . . !"

So saying, the butcher shook a powerful fist beneath the Cavalier's nose.

"Hurrah, Jemmy!" shouted the bull-dogs, immediately forming a circle about the two antagonists. "Give the Frenchie a lesson!"

The Cavalier drew back hesitatingly. What a wretched, mean affair he had got himself into! A fist-fight! Bah, that brutal, vulgar method of upholding one's honor revolted every refined instinct in him! Moreover, it was the first time that he had been obliged to call upon his fists, and he was horrified at the idea of certain defeat in front of these mocking islanders—and before this lovely lady.

He heard insulting laughs from the crowd, and the terrible word "coward!" *He,* Cavalier Tancrède, he afraid!! With a prompt movement he threw to the ground his coat, sword, and hat, and put himself on guard as well as he knew how. From this moment an absolute silence reigned—every true British heart holds nothing more sacred than a boxing match. Beginning the attack with a series of dazzling feints calculated to amaze his opponent and to de-

light the crowd, the butcher then aimed a straight blow at the Cavalier's chin. But his arm shot into thin air. The young man had nimbly dodged the powerful thrust.

"Damn!" swore the fighter, regaining his balance.

He tried to make up for his first failure with a sharp left to the head; but Tancrède bent over suddenly and again the Englishman had missed his mark. The butcher decided to change tactics; forsaking the head, he aimed for the youth's stomach. This time he struck with more care. Yet, horrors, the lithe Frenchman had leapt to one side so agilely that his opponent nearly fell to the ground. This time a murmur of admiration came from the crowd.

The young Frenchman's tactics had been crowned with success up to this point. But he was merely avoiding blows without making any attempt to reply in kind, and the spectators realized that the plucky youth might delay the final outcome but that he could not hope to escape. The butcher was now making things more lively. He sought to fall into a clinch so that his tricky opponent would be unable to avoid his blows. He finally succeeded in landing several jabs, but it was at such close quarters that they had little effect. Still Tancrède refused to make any attempt to attack. Zounds, what could he be waiting for?

Suddenly the massive fist landed a terrific blow to the face. The young man felt his cheeks burning and blood streaming from a cut over his eye. He quivered as if he had been hit by a sledge-hammer.

"One for me!" shouted the fighter.

Tancrède's greatest weakness was his pride in his personal appearance. The thought that he would be disfigured caused a strange shudder to shake him. For the first time in

his life the young soldier had the sensation of fear! The fear of a brave person is a terrible thing! The Cavalier flushed, turned pale, and then became fairly purple with rage; his eyes gleamed wildly. Rushing forward savagely, his two fists began to rain a series of fierce blows on his opponent. In a short time the butcher was bleeding freely at the mouth and nose. The helpless giant sweated, panted, and swung wildly but aimlessly at the infuriated Frenchman. Before the astonished spectators quite knew what had happened, the Cavalier had sent a hard blow to the stomach and then two lightning jabs at the face, and the butcher collapsed unconscious. Tancrède had scored a knock-out!

At this very moment the crowd opened to make way for a new arrival. Although we have taken a good deal of time to describe this fight, it had actually been fought with breathless rapidity. Only a few minutes had elapsed between the sudden breaking loose of the horses and the lamentable fall of Brighton's boxing champion. When Tancrède first noticed the carriage of the lovely English lady, a gentleman on horseback had just parted from it and had started off in the direction of the beach. Seeing his fair friend threatened, he had hastened to come to her rescue. But in spite of his promptness, he arrived just in time to see the Cavalier's amazing triumph.

As soon as this gentleman appeared, a large number of men, all with closely cropped heads, separated themselves from the crowd and silently ranged themselves alongside the newcomer. He raised his hand, and at once his followers opened a passage to the carriage. In the meantime the butcher had struggled to his feet, and was looking for his

opponent in order to get his revenge. At another gesture from the Cavalier, a line of men was quickly formed to separate the two antagonists.

These proceedings were not observed by Tancrède, who was busy straightening his clothes and brushing off the dust. Having performed this operation with minute care, the brave youth passed down the double line of "Roundheads," and approached the carriage from which the beautiful occupant had been watching with extreme anxiety the efforts of her champion. When he suddenly saw the newcomer standing near the door, Tancrède sprang back a step.

"Monsieur Cromwell!" he murmured in surprise.

The member of Parliament bowed coldly, and then leaning toward the lady, whispered:

"That's the young Frenchman of whom I was speaking."

The lady examined the youth's handsome figure curiously, while Tancrède bowed low. She had very extraordinary eyes, eyes that could show every subtle shade of feeling. When at ease they exerted a quiet fascination; but once aroused they could express every gradation of violent emotion. She was now looking at the Cavalier with an almost tender interest. She extended her white, aristocratic hand to her champion, who hastened to press it to his lips. She then murmured in a sweet voice:

"I always knew the French were chivalrous and gallant, but I never thought that they were experts in boxing. Your marvellous courage, sir, deserves a reward. Will you be kind enough to come and receive it at *The Brighton Arms?*"

On pronouncing these words, the lady's voice trembled slightly as if she were subject to an emotion difficult to re-

strain. Tancrède made a stammering reply and then left hastily, worried by the unexpected turn that this adventure had taken. As he left, he heard the harsh voice of Cromwell grumble:

"This is annoying, dear Countess! A hot-headed young Frenchman, without a brain in his head! And this is not the time when we wish anyone interfering with our affairs."

"Thank heavens," smiled Tancrède, amused. "Perhaps this Monsieur Cromwell is human after all. Could he by any chance be jealous? Hmm, what wise words he gave me: 'It is through Eve that Evil has entered this world!' Oh, oh, these Puritans! . . . And so she's a Countess! Well, after all, she is also a woman."

The scene of the epic combat between the French swordsman and the British butcher had now assumed a different aspect. The butcher was back in his shop, and his followers had returned to their various occupations. The fair lady and the Puritan cavalier had once again bidden farewell to each other and gone their respective ways. Of the large crowd of spectators who had watched the fight, only three now remained.

One of them had a tall thin wolf-like appearance greatly resembling that of a certain friend of ours by the name of Vauselle. His two companions were obviously of that common ne'er-do-well type who inhabit most sea-side towns, waiting for some chance opportunity of gaining money, preferably by dishonest means. They might have been card-sharks, or smugglers, or assassins, but no matter what they were, they listened with great deference to the tall man's words.

"Yes, it's certainly he," he said, following with his eye the figure of the retreating Cavalier. "I recognized him from the boat at Portsmouth. *Per Bacco,* as my friend Monsieur de Mazarin would say, this is more luck than I dared expect! The youth has delivered himself up!"

Then, turning to his followers, he continued:

"That's your man. You know what you are to do."

The thugs made wry faces. "You spoke of a mere child," said one of the men. "According to you, he was a poor, defenceless little lamb! No, this is a dangerous business. We need more money."

The man with the wolf-like smile shrugged his shoulders, and answered:

"Very well! If you succeed, and if you are clever enough to obtain 'the paper,' I'll double the price!"

"All right!" agreed the two mercenaries in a single voice.

Then, without another word, they marched off in pursuit of the young man. The lean personage watched them disappear, after which he rubbed his hands together in a satisfied manner.

"Now I can continue to London. There's little chance of the tricky youth escaping me now! Ah, *mordieu,* the lovely Madame de Chevreuse will be delighted to see me again. How brave I have been to return to her safe and sound! Oh, what courage I must have shown to make my miraculous escape from the Bastille!"

Having thus settled his immediate affairs, Monsieur de Vauselle left in the direction of the inn from which the London stage departed.

CHAPTER IX

PERFIDIOUS ALBION!

THE Cavalier's conscience was disturbed after this last adventure which might have had such serious consequences for his mission. He returned at once to his room and locked himself in. He was determined not to budge until Saturday, and this time he kept his word. Each evening he sent the boy to report on any new arrivals. But no one answered to the description of Cyrano, Saint-Amant, or Linières. Tancrède concluded that his friends had been delayed in crossing, and that they would go straight to London.

Accordingly, on Saturday morning, he directed the porter to reserve a place for him in the coach that evening. Then after paying his bill to the landlady, he awaited the hour of departure. Shortly after noon, while he was at lunch, the servant introduced a tall, handsome lackey dressed in a gold-braided livery that Tancrède at once recognized as that of the beautiful lady of his recent adventure. The imposing flunkey bowed, left a letter and a package on the table, and departed without a word.

This unexpected apparition so astonished our friend that he stared open-mouthed, his fork poised in mid-air. When

he recovered his wits sufficiently to rush after the lackey, the man had already disappeared. The Cavalier broke the seal of the letter, and read:

What am I to think of your silence? Is it due to fear, suspicion, or dislike? Are you brave with men alone—an Ajax with them but an Hippolytus with us? You merited a reward, yet you did not deign to come for it. You have been guilty of a misdemeanor for which you must ask pardon. Come at once and I may still be weak enough to grant it.

The letter was signed with the one letter *S*. There could be no doubt—these lines could have been penned only by the hand of the lovely lady of the carriage.

"My Star is still with me!" thought the young man. "With no desire to be vain, I may fairly believe that this beautiful creature has an interest in me. *Peste*, for three days a lady has searched Brighton for *me*, a total stranger, and then is forced to write a somewhat compromising letter!"

Mechanically he fingered the letter. "Compromising? Hmm! That remains to be seen. The seal? A crest without initials . . . that doesn't tell me much! The signature? A single letter . . . well, again not much. As for the handwriting, the lady might have dictated the letter to a secretary. No, my fair friend has not compromised herself after all!"

At heart Tancrède was annoyed. It was difficult for a youth of his nature to play the calm, disinterested hero.

There was something devilishly haunting about the woman's eyes. And she didn't seem to be the type of person who would submit to the humiliation of a refusal without resentment.

"Who can she be?" he asked himself in some perplexity. "A friend of Monsieur Cromwell . . . a Countess . . . a woman who smiles beautifully—that's all I know!"

The Cavalier folded the letter, placed it in his pocket, and then bowing low murmured:

"No, taking everything into consideration, Madame, I feel unable to accept your flattering invitation. I have already broken the first of your friend Cromwell's four rules of conduct, and that transgression almost led to an unfortunate conclusion. Enough! I intend to follow with religious care the gentleman's three other precepts. And then, you see, as far as I am concerned, there is only one woman in the world—Claire, the darling girl who is waiting for me, faithful and trusting. . . . No, I am mistaken, there is one other: Madame de Chevreuse, the friend of my Queen, and my protectress, whom I am now hastening to meet."

Tancrède, delighted to discover himself so strong in resisting this temptation, proceeded to finish his lunch. He then noticed the package left on the table by the Countess of S's silent ambassador.

"Well, by Jove, what's this?" he muttered as he unwrapped the present. "A purse, *sarpejeu!* And a well-filled one, too. My lovely conquest certainly thinks of everything, and also knows how to combine the practical with the beautiful."

The Cavalier's first thought was to return the package to *The Brighton Arms*. But while he was re-wrapping it, he had time to reflect. He remembered that the abrupt return of such a gift would make him appear extremely ungracious. And of course, the wind-fall was most timely. The cost of his passage to London and the money he had given the landlady left him with an uncomfortably slender purse. After all, when he had reached the capital, he could repay the money at once, thanks to the promised liberality of Lord Montague and Madame de Chevreuse. It was this thought, that he was merely accepting a temporary advance, that turned the scales, and he accordingly pocketed the purse.

The hour for departure was near at hand, and Tancrède went to the posting-house to take his place in the London diligence. When he arrived, the four corner seats were already occupied. The first person he noticed was a fat, periwigged man in a flame-colored box-coat, striped stockings, and broad shoes with silver buckles. He seemed to be a perfect example of a worthy London merchant. Opposite him sat a young girl of considerable beauty and of an attractive figure. She was carefully wrapped in a large Capuchin cloak, and gave the appearance of a "beauty" who had gone to the popular watering-place in search of fortune, and was now returning—having reaped her harvest. At least, this presumption might be justified by the tenderly provocative looks and the coquettish airs which she displayed for the benefit of the highly respectable merchant.

The opposite end of the coach was occupied by two rather less prepossessing individuals. They seemed to be travelling companions, although one of the men was of great height, while the other was small, even weazened. But

they were obviously of the same general species, both having an air of bravado and both dressed in costumes that showed them to be men of the sword.

Tancrède stepped between the legs of these "gentlemen," and sat down beside the pretty girl. In those days a trip in a stage-coach was a long and uncomfortable undertaking. The box in which the travellers found themselves ensconced was visited by a great number of annoying little draughts that crept in through countless cracks and played havoc with benumbed legs. The only protection against the cold was a litter of straw on the floor in which one could thrust his feet in search of warmth.

But the most provoking thing of all was the slowness of these so-called "diligences." First, there were frequent stops for the changing of horses; and then there were endless obstacles along the road which interrupted the slow progress. This was particularly true of hills, at the foot of which the passengers had to descend and walk.

It can be imagined with what small patience our hot-headed young friend bore these irritations. He might, with the help of his obliging admirer's purse, have obtained a horse and made the trip in a more comfortable manner; but the prudent youth thought that he would attract less attention by riding in the coach. He felt that it was extremely important not to be recognized until he had delivered the Queen's message and come under the wing of his new protectors. It was for this same reason that he maintained an unusual reserve toward his fellow travellers.

After the first change of horses, the fat Londoner had fallen asleep in his corner. The flirtatious girl seized this opportunity to throw several devastating glances in the

direction of the young Frenchman, but Tancrède did not respond. Annoyed by this failure, the girl pretended to sleep. The youth then thought it safe to cast an admiring glance at his fair neighbor; at each jolt of the vehicle, she let her body slip nearer and nearer to the Cavalier. Our hero, however, did not allow himself to be tricked in this manner, and with an air of offended dignity, moved a safe distance away. This movement brought him near the two professional swordsmen, and his right boot knocked under the straw against the foot of the weazened little man. The fellow must have have had an extraordinarily sensitive foot, for he uttered a vile-sounding oath. His companion hastened to smooth things over by delivering an apology in bad French, and then smiling so broadly that he showed all his long, sharp teeth.

More and more cautious, Tancrède ignored the oath in favor of the compliment, and offered a brief excuse for his clumsiness. Then, desiring to cut short any opportunity for friendliness, he wrapped himself snugly in his coat, pulled his hat over his face, and tried to sleep. When he finally opened his eyes night had come. The part of the carriage in which the beautiful girl and the stout merchant were sleeping was plunged in heavy darkness; but in contrast, near the door the faces of the two swordsmen were illuminated by what seemed to the youth a supernatural light. Further examination, however, disclosed that this light came merely from the lantern attached to the rear of the coach.

The two men had stretched a coat over their knees, and by the flickering rays, were engaged in a passionate game of piquet. Tancrède, as we know, was devoted to cards.

He had promised not to play himself, but there was nothing to prevent his watching others. In this ingenuous way he was able to satisfy his desire to a certain extent without breaking his word.

The game became more and more exciting. The little man was supported by the Goddess of Luck, to judge from the imposing pile of guineas at his side. But, like all women, Luck is a fickle, uncertain jade. The man now had a period of incredibly bad luck, and each hand saw his pile of winnings diminish. The Cavalier had a warm heart and felt for the fellow's ill fortune. But his emotions were more strongly aroused when he saw that the more he lost, the more he began to play with unbelievable stupidity. It almost seemed that he had become so perverse as to lose on purpose! The sensitive spectator could scarcely contain himself at each new mistake his neighbor made. He wriggled uncomfortably on the bench, shrugged his shoulders, and emitted suppressed sighs. Finally the loser played an unbelievably stupid hand in which he allowed himself to lose every trick. This was too much for Tancrède, who exploded, saying:

"Why, *morbleu*, you should have played pique, repique, discarded clubs and held your diamonds!"

"Monsieur must be a clever player," said the winner amiably.

The loser looked at the Cavalier wonderingly. Vexed at being thus reproved, he muttered between his teeth:

"It's easier to advise than to play!"

A confused discussion followed. The loser insisted stoutly that there was no use opposing luck. His partner explained in a professional manner the twenty chances to

win that he had let pass. And Tancrède affirmed that a prudent player who kept his head could always live through a temporary run of bad luck.

"All right, take my place and prove what you say," said the loser angrily.

The Cavalier could hardly draw back now so, with the mental determination to cut the demonstration short, he took up the cards. He won. Obviously, it was his duty to continue a bit longer so that the other man could have a fair chance. Half an hour after the time he had begun to watch his neighbors' game, Tancrède was himself deep in the intricacies of piquet.

At each post-station they got out, stretched their legs, and had a glass or two of grog in the tavern. Tancrède's new companions mixed marvellous grogs and were generous in the amount of rum they allowed Tancrède's glass. Once back in the coach the game went on. The Cavalier began to get accustomed to the faces of his new companions. They no longer seemed to be bravoes, but good fellows instead. Their French was most amusing, containing bits of English, Italian, even Spanish. The mixture sounded well in the mouths of these men of the world.

And all the time the Cavalier kept winning. Who wouldn't like his companions in such circumstances? How could he distrust the men from whom he was winning so many guineas? Suddenly luck turned.

"Pooh, it's just for a moment!"

He doubled his stakes. He lost. He redoubled them and lost. His winnings melted under the onslaught. Soon they were gone and he drew out the Countess's purse and quietly divided the money into two parts: one part he set

aside. With that, *morbleu*, he could change his run of bad luck. Alas, the guineas of the Countess had come to him without asking and they flitted away as easily.

It was indeed a "clean sweep," as the little man said. What was he to do? Stop? *Cordieu*, no! There was still an arrow or two in his quiver. He extracted the reserve pile from the purse and threw it into the game.

It was a thrilling moment! The two men drew closer to the Cavalier as though closing in on a quarry. They excited him with a flow of talk that left him breathless; their eyes were fixed covetously on him. In this surcharged atmosphere the money disappeared so quickly, so surely that it was gone before the boy could collect his wits. He searched his pockets—not a coin! The others exchanged knowing glances, as much as to say: "Now is the time."

"Play the purse!" whispered the small man in Tancrède's ear. The purse was of chased gold. But an empty purse is a useless thing. The Cavalier tossed it in and lost.

"*Maladetta!*" exclaimed the small man. "It's the turn of the luck! Quick, play your cape."

"My mantle!" said Tancrède hesitating. "Well, after all, why not risk a half-worn garment to change the luck?"

"Done!" he said.

The mantle joined the purse.

"Steady, steady! Once more, my lad! It's coming! I feel it. Just once more."

"What do you wish me to play? I have nothing else," answered the Cavalier weakly.

"Nothing? How about the plume in your hat?—it is worth fifteen florins."

"Come, my boy, I'll play you twenty sovereigns against your hat!" offered the winner.

The shock of this remark sobered the Cavalier. He wiped the sweat from his brow and looked coldly at his two companions whose eyes were again glued upon him.

"Thank you," he remarked drily, "this has gone far enough."

He looked at the plume of his hat and said with a bitter laugh:

"This is my last plume. I'll keep it if you don't mind."

The two men drew back with an air of offended dignity, the smaller whispering into the ear of the other: "It's in his hat."

"I know it," was the response. "Leave it to me, comrade."

The card-playing had aroused the two passengers on the opposite side of the coach, and their sympathy was all with their fellow-Englishmen. An animated conversation followed, the larger of the two players engaging in a political discussion with the London merchant while the smaller one chatted with the languishing beauty. Tancrède, with a feeling of relief, drew away from them all as far as possible.

"Another lesson!" he thought.

He now saw that the whole thing was a trap from beginning to end. He had fallen into it and had been fleeced. But it was not his losses in money that bothered him. His passage was paid, and he could get to London without further expenditures. No, what troubled him was their play-

ing first for his cloak and then trying for his hat! What were they after? If the meeting was prearranged, how had they got hold of their information?

He was turning these points over in his mind when he began to be conscious that the others were looking at him and talking about him. Certain phrases brought the blood to his cheeks. "French tongues and swords were sharp, but could do no harm."

"Be careful, Cavalier, another trap!" he thought. "Will nothing satisfy them? They have my money, my purse, even my cloak, and now they are searching for my skin underneath. Zeus, Tancrède, are you to be skinned alive?"

He turned his back and closed his lips firmly. The trick was too plain. He sat quietly looking out the window and watching the thin line of trees as they raced by in the moonlight. He could shut out all but a few words of the talk that went on near him. It was impossible not to hear such familiar words as France, the Pope, Cardinal, King.

They continued to bait him. Pooh, what did Tancrède care for English opinion! Religion and politics and all that—there was no need for him to burn his fingers there! No, to catch him they must try something else.

But suddenly, with the spring of a wounded beast, the Cavalier turned upon them, his face deathly pale, his eyes flashing with anger. They had reached him by two short words.

"The Queen!" he roared. "Who dares speak here of the Queen of France?"

"Oh!" said the merchant sarcastically. "You refer to Anne the Papist?"

"The Beast of the Apocalypse?" suggested the smaller gambler.

"The indulgent friend of the dastardly Buckingham!" added his accomplice.

"The Messalina of France!" sneered the girl.

Tancrède heard no more. His temples throbbed and with one spring he was in their midst. He knocked the two bravoes to one side, and gripped the merchant by the collar. The tradesman, half choking, sputtered:

"Let me . . . what madness . . . religion . . . moral . . . s!"

Throwing this unworthy antagonist aside, the Cavalier laughed harshly, crying:

"Splendid champions you are of morals and religion! A gossip, a cuckold, and two bandits!"

"By Jove, the Frenchman is walking all over us! Did you see how he jostled the girl?"

"Take a warning from me," shouted Tancrède, "and shut your mouths. Another word from you and I'll teach you a trick that will stop your card cheating for life!"

"*Gracia de dios!*" exclaimed the smaller rogue, protecting himself behind his friend's back. "Is this a challenge?"

"I take it up, by the devil!" said his companion. "Perhaps, my fine lad, *you* will be shown a trick you don't know."

The stage-coach was now at the foot of a long and fairly steep ascent. The travellers had to get out and walk.

"Fate has decreed this!" murmured Tancrède, as he sprang from the coach. "It's better to have it over with now!"

His adversary followed him out and gave orders to the coachman.

"Go on slowly, my friend. Monsieur and I must have a chat behind the poplars. Five minutes and I shall rejoin the coach."

"My friend, in France we'd call that boasting."

The two rogues exchanged a few words in a low voice. Then the swordsmen walked to the fringe of trees and disappeared.

A meadow, bathed in quiet moonlight, opened before them.

"How charming!" mocked the bravo. "Artemis herself furnishes us the torch to light our *fiesta*."

Deliberately he took off his mantle. As he could not do as much, the Cavalier fastened more closely his doublet. The other drew off his hat and placed it on a bush. Tancrède pulled his on more tightly.

"Don't you ever remove your hat?" inquired the bravo.

"No!"

"It is customary."

"It's not my custom!"

"As you wish," he replied, though he seemed annoyed. "In that case I shall imitate you. But it is not etiquette, my young friend. Saint Peter may be shocked if you appear with your hat on!"

He drew his sword with a flourish. The Cavalier followed suit.

"On guard!"

The swords crossed and drew sparks. A series of quick thrusts and parries, then a short pause. The bravo tried an Italian trick, a little known, fatal thrust. Quick as a

flash Tancrède parried it. An arm collapsed limply. Crack! Something heavy had fallen in the bushes. The moonlight shone upon the writhing form of the prostrate swordsman.

The Cavalier wiped his sword with a handful of grass, and without troubling to find out whether his adversary were alive or dead, he rapidly regained the highway. Zounds, how far away the stage-coach was! His adversary had so slowed up the duel with his eternal preparations that the coach had nearly reached the top of the hill.

He started at a run, shouting:

"Hola! Stop!"

Thank heaven! The heavy vehicle had just reached the summit of the hill and the driver had heard his call. The horses, steaming and quite winded, had stopped of their own accord. The Cavalier redoubled his pace.

Morbleu! What did it mean? He must be dizzy! The stage-coach seemed to be moving. The driver gave a warning cry, the postillions cracked their whips—and that devil of a little rogue was looking back at him maliciously!

Tricked, *parbleu!* tricked once more! The coach began to descend rapidly and was soon lost to view. When the Cavalier reached the top of the hill, it was only a black speck on the white road.

This was too much! Tancrède shook his fist furiously. His wrath was concentrated in one phrase, which covered both things and people—all that were leagued against him:

"*Perfidious, oh, perfidious Albion!*"

CHAPTER X

AFTER THIRTEEN YEARS

ABANDONED on the desolate highway, Tancrède pulled himself together and thought over his plight. His first task was to get to London on foot. Judging by the stops made, he estimated he was a third of the way there. That meant certainly fifteen leagues, nearly two days' journey.

This must be done without a penny of money, without food, through an unknown and hostile country and, as he had just found out, one filled with ambushes.

"Delightful prospect!" muttered the Cavalier. "Ah, Master Cromwell, how prophetic were your words: never be involved in street rows, never gamble, never draw the sword over a question of politics."

"Well, I've broken three of his precepts already—what was the fourth? Ah, yes, I recall: *beware of women!* As far as that is concerned, I'm safe."

This last thought put our hero in a better humor. His temperament was a gay and courageous one, and he turned resolutely away from sad thoughts and became the self-confident Tancrède of old.

All night Tancrède walked on. The only noise he heard was that of the furious baying of watch-dogs in the farm-yards as they strained on their chains to get at him.

When daylight came he was ashamed to be seen in his shabby attire, and made long detours to avoid manor houses, villages, and towns. This kept him from making much progress. Toward the end of the morning he was disturbed to discover that he had gone only a few miles. Fatigue stiffened his legs; hunger gnawed at his empty stomach.

He sat down by the side of the road, ate a handful of berries picked from a bush, and began to think seriously. One thing was obvious—he must reach London at any cost. Even more, he must get there as quickly as possible. The trap from which he had just escaped showed only too clearly that some secret enemy was working to keep him from fulfilling his mission, or at least was trying to detain him. How was he to avoid an invisible enemy and, above all, how could he speed his journey?

For a moment he considered turning highwayman and relieving the first passing rider of his mount. This thought was in his mind when the sound of wheels caused him to turn his head. A carriage drawn by six stout horses was approaching rapidly in a cloud of dust. In a moment the outrider was up with the Cavalier; without stopping, he cried:

"Fellow, tell us about the road?"

"Is the city there, Dorking?" called the first postillion.

"Or is it Reigate?" shouted the second.

"*Mordiable!*" replied Tancrède. "I was about to ask you."

"Who is this person?" asked a voice from within the carriage.

"A young man! A foreigner! A Frenchman!" replied the postillion.

Then, as if by enchantment, the carriage stopped and a moment later a blond head appeared at the carriage door. The Cavalier, transfixed, found himself face to face with his "unknown lady."

"Ah—but—it is he, it is my hero, my cavalier of Brighton, my warrior!" exclaimed the fair traveller rapturously. "So this is the young man whom I have to pursue with a coach and six. Come nearer that I may see you, wicked boy."

Tancrède prayed that the earth might swallow him up, along with his dusty clothes. But he walked forward, blushing violently, his hat in his hand. To his relief, the expression on the lady's face showed neither pity nor raillery. In a gentle voice she said to someone he could not see:

"Pamela, see what a pitiable state this dear boy is in."

The pretty face of the lady's maid appeared at the window; her glance too was sympathetic and tender.

The lady continued softly:

"My dear knight-errant, must I think that you had such horror of me that you fled from Brighton on foot?"

The Cavalier protested warmly. It was his own duties that had made an immediate departure for London necessary. He was careful to say nothing of the trap into which he had fallen or to mention the loss of the purse.

"If you had been more trusting," remarked the Countess, "you would have known why I wrote you yesterday, and might have been spared . . . disagreeable hardships. Since I was going to London I wished to offer you a place in my carriage, always provided that travelling in my company would not pain you, Sir Knight."

Tancrède's first reaction on seeing the Countess was one

of suspicion. The search for him in Brighton, followed by this unexpected meeting, awakened fears in his mind. He was not in the mood to believe in good-fortune and providential happenings. But the lady's explanation was so reasonable and her gentleness so evidently sincere that the youth felt his resistance give way.

"Madame," he said, "I hardly know how to express my gratitude for your kindness, especially when I have been so lacking—"

"Your own country has some admirable sayings. One of them is 'Everything in its own good time'; another 'What is delayed is not lost.' Please then accept in the morning what I wished to offer in the evening."

As she said this, her white hand opened the door of the carriage. And, as matters stood, the lover of Claire de Cernay could think of no polite means of refusing. Still he hesitated, saying:

"May I ask to whom I owe this invitation?"

"Your question is only too proper! You do not know my name, nor I yours!"

"I am called the Cavalier Tancrède."

"My dear Cavalier, will you henceforth number among your friends: Daisy, Countess of Suttland?"

The name was unknown to the young messenger of Anne of Austria. He bowed gracefully and entered the carriage.

D'Artagnan and Aramis, detained at *The Flemish Fox*, watched the slow passing of the three days of delay demanded by Master Van Heybrock, Imperial and Royal Notary.

As the end of the period approached, the Musketeer's im-

patience turned into a veritable frenzy. What little he knew of the history of Patrick served to lift but a corner of the veil of mystery which both for him and for Anne of Austria enshrouded the past of the young "Cavalier Tancrède." The perusal of the papers left by Buckingham's confidential servant would throw definite light on this tantalizing mystery.

"Yes, the silent Abbé knew what he was about when he brought me to this obscure corner of Flanders!" thought d'Artagnan.

He was convinced that Patrick would not return to claim his precious packet. Aramis however, did not, apparently, altogether share this conviction. Whenever the Gascon raised the question—as he had done a hundred times during the three days—the priest would answer evasively:

"One never knows! It is only the dead who do not return!"

"Exactly," argued d'Artagnan. "The faithful Irishman *must be dead.*"

By the evening of the third day, the Musketeer, no longer able to restrain himself, went to see Master Van Heybrock. The office was just about to be closed. The first words of the notary were reassuring:

"No one has come in connection with the affair which concerns you, Monsieur the Lieutenant, and your friend—still we must be exact and legal in this case. The day ends at midnight—and until then we must wait."

The notary supported this declaration by a Latin phrase, but the Musketeer was not listening. He returned to the inn at once, in high spirits.

"Wait until tomorrow," was the laconic advice of his

old comrade in arms. Decidedly, the Abbé had something in the back of his mind. The impatient Gascon wished to remove all doubts in the matter, and replied:

"Come, Aramis, what do you really think of it all? Is it likely that a man who disappeared under tragic circumstances should suddenly reappear thirteen years later? Isn't it obvious that Patrick lost his life in pursuit of those who stole the child? Otherwise, he would not have waited all these years before returning!"

Without raising his eyes from his book, Aramis answered:

"Who told you that Patrick has never returned?"

This remark completely disconcerted the Musketeer and he swore violently under his breath.

"Instead of losing your temper, why not think over the question of these papers left to the mercy of whoever wished to use them . . ."

"After thirteen years!"

"Time is not a factor in the matter! Does it seem reasonable that these documents would be left to the mercy of an avowed enemy or of a doubtful friend?"

"Zounds, I hadn't thought of that."

"I have thought a great deal about it. I feel that these papers are merely a bait to attract either friends or foes who are interested in the problem of the Cavalier Tancrède."

"Not much of a bait, so far as I can see," put in d'Artagnan quickly. "What has it attracted so far?"

"Gently, my friend," smiled the Abbé. "Do you forget that for three days you and I have been nibbling at this same bait?"

The Musketeer dropped his eyes in confusion.

"But," he insisted, "are we to think that this Irishman came back from time to time, that he kept in touch with this place and was informed of what had happened in his absence?"

"Exactly! Suppose that one of those old men with whom you saw me chatting that first evening by the canal . . ."

"Devil take them and their speech that no Christian can understand!"

"Silence, blasphemer! I claim to be a Christian, and yet I understood their speech. One of the old men told me this story. His home is near the haunted house, as they call it. During the long period that followed the destruction of the building, every year, about the same date, a strange thing happened: the gate of Patrick's former house which had always been kept shut, was found open in the morning."

"*Diantre*, what's remarkable about that! Someone had entered during the night!"

"You think, then—?"

"*Mordi*, I begin to think you are right and that we have been tricked!"

Aramis stroked his smooth hands, as he answered:

"Keep calm, d'Artagnan. That's going too far. Let us say rather that we are uncertain. The truth is that in recent times these visits have become less regular, and have ceased entirely for five years."

"May the Devil take this Irishman with all his precautions and tricks!"

"Be fair, my friend. This man's life has been dedicated to a sacred and difficult task. He knows the ambushes that are set for his path. It is his right, nay his duty, to take any steps dictated by the strictest prudence!"

"And in the meantime I shall be on the rack until to-morrow morning."

"We must hope for the best," said the Abbé lifting a finger toward heaven, and then fixing his eyes on his book.

The chaplain seemed lost in his studies, and showed no desire to hear the questions that rushed incoherently to d'Artagnan's lips. The Musketeer, finding himself without an audience, threw himself on his bed. The reader can guess what a night he passed. The fever burned in his veins and kept him tossing on his bed and shifting his position, in vain efforts to sleep. At times he would sit up, and call out:

"Aramis, listen!"

The priest gave him always a deaf ear. His calm manner exasperated d'Artagnan and did not assist him in his efforts to sleep.

Cramped and depressed after the long night of wakefulness, d'Artagnan hastened to the notary's office at the hour for opening. There a surprise was in store for him.

After supper the evening before, Master Van Heybrock, his feet by the fire, had smoked his pipe and sipped a few pots of beer. Feeling a pleasant lassitude creep over him, he had unfastened his belt and dozed off in his arm-chair, merely as a preliminary to his more serious ten hours' sleep of the night.

About midnight something had awakened him suddenly. Had he heard a knock? Still half asleep, he arose to his

feet and listened. Yes, there was a noise outside the house. He had not been dreaming. Someone was knocking gently on the window.

Such was the story that Master Van Heybrock had been pouring into the ear of the Musketeer ever since his arrival at the office. At this point d'Artagnan interrupted with a smile: "But you are a man of peace and you were alone. A knock at such an hour, I suppose, made you hesitate. You thought it more prudent not to open the door?"

"No, Lieutenant. This is a safe country; only stragglers from the Imperial army come this way, and even they do not come often. I went to the door and opened it. A man stood there waiting, a traveller. He had obviously waited until midnight so that he could approach my house, unseen. His face was flooded with light from the lamp I carried and I recognized—"

"No honest man, I'll wager; he would not have taken so many precautions. Doubtless some beggar."

"Not at all! Can't you guess? It was . . ."

D'Artagnan turned swiftly.

"Patrick!" he exclaimed, collapsing with a despairing gesture into an arm-chair. "It was Patrick! All is lost!"

The notary smiled and went on to explain:

"Please listen to me. Patrick never said good-bye to me for good and all. He returned here at irregular intervals, sometimes of months and even at times of years. So, although his visit last night was unexpected, it did not surprise me."

"And he doubtless took all his papers from you—this Irishman who has been flitting in and out so mysteriously!

Sandi, what luck! What an end to our hopes! Now we shall know nothing!"

"Heavens, Monsieur, how fast you go! Wait a moment! Patrick stayed with me long enough to have a bite to eat. I had time to tell him that there were two gentlemen who . . . Well, I spoke to him about Monsieur l'Abbé and you. Doubtless he will go to your inn."

"No," muttered the Gascon, attempting to conceal his disappointment.

"Why not?"

"If he had intended to come he would have been there before now."

Thoroughly disheartened, d'Artagnan left the notary's office. At the first turn of the street he ran into his friend who was walking slowly along, his eyes fixed on his breviary.

"Aramis, it's all up!"

The Abbé put a marker in his breviary, and asked:

"What's all up?"

"The whole game! It's a complete disaster! Patrick came, and has now left with the papers."

"Come, now," replied the Abbé, "things are picking up. You remember what I said last night?"

"Last night? What was it? Oh, yes, the gate's being open and all that?"

"Yes, exactly. My dear fellow, it's open now."

"The gate to the 'haunted' house is open?"

"Well, it was this morning, and it may still be. Suppose we go and see."

The two friends walked rapidly, and soon arrived at the ruins of the burned house. They pushed through the gate

and picked their way through the court, overgrown with the weeds and bushes that had taken possession of the abandoned residence. When they reached the house, they lifted the latch and pushed on the door. The hinges creaked but yielded.

They entered resolutely. They were now in a great hall. The shuttered windows kept it dark, but the alternating rain and heat of thirteen years had split the wooden boards so that some rays of light penetrated into the room.

When their eyes had become used to the dim light, the two friends saw a thread of smoke coming from a half-consumed log in the great fireplace. In the middle of the hall was a table made of a thick, rectangular oaken slab held up by massive legs; on it was a candlestick of wrought iron, upon which a tallow candle was dripping. By the table loomed a dark mass. Suddenly they recognized the figure of a man seated, his back bent and his head buried in his long arms that lay crossed on the table.

"It is he!" whispered the Musketeer.

"Patrick!" called the Chaplain softly.

The man raised to them a face rough, tanned, and toughened by exposure and by long travels over land and on sea in search of a lost child. Raising his head slowly, the mysterious wanderer said:

"Thank God, you have come! How long I have waited for you! Patrick O'Brien welcomes Monsieur Aramis and Monsieur d'Artagnan."

The amazement of the two visitors was profound.

"Patrick," said the Abbé, "do you then know us?"

Certainly he knew them and had known them for a long time. He remembered far away events. His life

had touched and even mingled with those of high personages. He had had a part in their adventures at court, in politics, and in love; how could he forget the names of the famous Musketeers, those intrepid horsemen, those clever diplomats, those fiery swordsmen who had thrown themselves into the maddest of all risks and had brought it to a triumphant end.

At that time he, Patrick O'Brien, was the trusted servant of George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, and these young men had by their devotion restored the confidence of the King of France in the English nobleman, and had spoiled the shameful intrigues of the jealous and vindictive Richelieu.

Patrick had been able, even though at a distance, to keep in touch with what happened to his beloved Musketeers of former days. He had not seen them, but now and then he had heard of their adventures. Thus he knew of the nomination of d'Artagnan to his lieutenancy, and that Aramis had gone into the Church.

For the moment he felt a great joy and hope over the result of his efforts; for he was sure that this new quest of the two friends was linked with his own task, a task to which his whole life of loyalty and solitary suffering had been devoted. Impulsively Aramis and d'Artagnan held out their hands to this worthy old man. He pressed them warmly but respectfully.

"This is the very spot where the crime was committed," said Patrick gently, as his sad eyes wandered over the dark hall which had been the scene of his joys as a foster-father and of his later cruel disillusionment. "For thirteen years,

ever since he was stolen from this ill-fated room, I have not ceased to search for my young lord.

"I can give you little idea of my fruitless efforts, my failures, and my despondency during these thirteen years of vain searching. In England I could follow the spectacle of evil triumphing from day to day, growing ever stronger.

"I came to France, but where could I go? What would guide me? Toward what end should I direct my efforts? There was not one ray of light to help me. I knew nothing; not even *the name of the child's mother!* This secret the Duke of Buckingham guarded jealously and allowed no person to pry into. All I could guess was that the mother must be a great lady at court. What irony in that for, alas, many great ladies were victims to my poor lord's charms. Which one was she?"

For a moment the Musketeer had seemed anxious, but the assurance that the Queen's secret was safe relieved him. Patrick, however, had observed nothing of this and went on with his story:

"I knew that I was going about blind-folded, that to find my great lady at court was like searching for a needle in a hay-stack. Like all lost creatures I must trust to Providence. But Providence only helps those who help themselves.

"In my despair I conceived the idea, an uncertain, odd idea, of spreading a kind of net in this half burned and ill-omened house. Friend or enemy, I thought, no matter which, will one day come here to gather up the broken threads of this horrible plot. If it be a friend, God be praised, for he will be seeking for the child's safety, and he will find me ready to help him. But if, on the con-

trary, it be an enemy, I will follow him like his own shadow to avenge my child, my lost master.

"Heaven has heard me. At this supreme hour, after thirteen years, during which I have suffered the pains of the damned, God has rewarded me and has led you to this unhappy house—you—my—friends!"

The hesitation with which these three last words came from Patrick's lips astonished the two Frenchmen. Evidently the honest man was not perfectly sure of their friendship. Beneath half-closed lids, a sharp, inquisitorial glance searched their faces for a sign. With trembling fingers the old man pushed back from his forehead the mass of grey hair which had covered it. He then continued:

"In all events, Sirs, I am pleased that you have come. Your very presence, even if you have not said so, confirms me in the belief that *the child is living!*"

He clasped his hands.

"Do not say 'no,' I implore you! You have seen him? You know him? He will have grown to be a man by now."

The two friends at once confirmed his hopes by an inclination of the head.

"Thank God! I am indeed repaid!" said the old man, as the tears flowed down his face. The contagion of the emotion had already seized the Musketeer.

"Patrick," said the Chaplain, whose cool brain could not be affected by sentiment, "you have not yet told us how and where this young man was confided to your care."

The Irishman wiped his tears away with the back of his hand.

"That is true. Listen then, for I should like you to

know how precious that child was to me. At his birth he was brought from France and put under the protection of his father, my lord the Duke. As he must be brought up in the strictest secrecy, he was sent to Scotland, entrusted to Laird Angus MacDiarmid. This noble Scot was a man of high position and owed everything to the patronage of my lord. The Laird's integrity was unquestioned, and absolute confidence was placed in him.

"My master, the rich and powerful favorite of a king, went to the sombre castle-fortress of Kildar to visit his son. He there recognized him in due form, and legally, as his son, and by a 'deed of gift between living persons,' assured him of ample fortune.

"I care not, gentlemen, what may be said against my master, but I affirm that in this case, as in all others, my lord the Duke showed himself a man of large heart, generous and loyal. This fortune he entrusted in *fidéicommis* to his friend, the Laird Angus, to be given to his son when he reached his majority. As long as his noble father lived, the child was carefully brought up. But on the twenty-third of August, 1638, my lord the Duke . . ."

"I remember," said d'Artagnan, shuddering. "On that date the noble lord fell under the dagger of a fanatic . . ."

"The English officer, Felton," breathed Aramis. "An unhappy wretch. May God pardon him!"

"May Hell keep him!" thundered Patrick. "No pity should be shown that monster! Gentlemen, my master's death agony was bitter; he thought of his child, then three years old. His last word was for this infant, now more than orphaned, in the fortress of Kildar. Warned by a gloomy presentiment, as soon as I had paid the last duties

to my master, I hastened to seek my young lord in the Highlands of Scotland.

"Ah! I had reason to hasten. This story, sirs, is all misfortune, treachery, and blind chance. I have said that Angus MacDiarmid was a trustworthy man, a faithful guardian. Listen, and you will learn how a man, whose life had been all honor and devotion, could sink until he was a lost soul, the betrayer of his benefactor, his companion-in-arms, his friend—a man who could become a thief, a brutal scoundrel."

The two listeners trembled. What were they now to hear? Patrick waited a moment to gather his forces, and then went on with his bitter tale:

"The Laird Angus was growing feeble in character even more rapidly than in body. There lived with him two children of his own blood, whose characters were already pitifully warped: a son, cold and hard, devoured by ambition and by envy; and a daughter, alas, as beautiful as an angel but with a depraved, perverse heart.

"Often the brother and sister indulged in bitter words. They had everything through which to achieve success: education, beauty—everything, that is, except money, and without money they could not realize their ambitions. To assure them this success, to give them wealth, the old Laird trod his honor under foot and gave in to their vile plans.

"One wild night when the whole world seemed to be lashed by the unchained elements—oh, horrible memory! —chance led me to overhear a conversation between brother and sister. Believing themselves entirely out of earshot, these wretches were callously plotting the murder of my

young lord. The dark and gloomy fortress of Kildar was to serve as the tomb of Buckingham's heir—of the 'bastard,' as they called him."

Shaken by the emotion caused by his own recital, Patrick stopped, and then went abruptly to the hearth, where he turned over the smouldering log.

CHAPTER XI

"YOU WILL BE AVENGED"

The Irishman resumed his seat, passed his hand through his thick grey hair, and continued:

"Oh, it was horrible! I rushed into the room where, in the midst of this nest of vipers, the threatened child slept in its fragile cradle. Wrapping him in a blanket, I slipped away from the Castle of Kildar, holding the precious burden in my arms.

"Outside, the storm raged in all its fury, the rain fell in torrents, terrific flashes of lightning lighted up the pitchy darkness, the thunder was deafening. They pursued me, desperately anxious to capture me. I hastened on, stopping the baby's frightened cries with my kisses. Gentlemen, I would have hurled myself over the cliff along with my poor master rather than let myself be seized. But God helped me. The wildness of the night caused these bloodhounds to lose my trail.

"And so it was that I came to install myself in this humble Flemish village, together with my little charge, the child of mystery. From that time on Patrick O'Brien, the humble Irishman, represented all that my young lord had by way of a family. Here I hoped to bring him up in igno-

rance of his destiny until the day should come for him to claim his just rights.

"But I was not to see that day dawn! I have never known how the children of the Laird Angus MacDiarmid were able to trace us here. Nevertheless, one night hired assassins broke into the house. They seized my young lord and set fire to the dwelling so as to remove any possible traces. Fortunately the precious papers on which the child's future depended were safe. The very morning of that disastrous day I had put them in a place where no one could discover them. These papers proved the boy's right to his father's property and name.

"Yet the plunderers had stolen a little casket containing pathetic souvenirs of the mother. The Duke of Buckingham had given it to me at the hour of his death. Its contents would enable the son, once he had assumed his proper rank, to identify the woman who had brought him into the world. Buckingham, always prudent, had decided that the son could not go to the mother until he was rich and free and would not endanger her.

"Why did these infamous assassins refrain from cutting the child's throat? I was able to trace them sufficiently to find out that they had spared his life, but I have never known why they hesitated before that last crime."

"We know the reason," said d'Artagnan, exchanging a swift look with his friend.

On hearing this statement, Patrick sprang to his feet.

"You!" he cried. "You know the reason? Oh, sirs, I have told you everything. Speak, I beg of you! It is your turn now."

This appeal went straight to the heart of Aramis, and

he prepared to answer it. But, biting his lips savagely, he remained silent, in terror of betraying the secrets of the confessional. D'Artagnan, however, had nothing to hide, and began to speak with great freedom.

"*Sacredi*, at last I'm beginning to see light! We have only held the two ends of the thread: the mysterious disappearance of Buckingham's son, and his miraculous reappearance in Paris."

"Paris!" repeated Patrick, his eyes sparkling with excitement.

"Between these two ends there seemed to be a hopeless gap. But now the continuity is restored! You ask, Patrick, why the assassins spared the child's life? Well, *mordi*, because their leader, although he had been paid to kill the boy, decided it might be worth his while to let him live! The scoundrel knew enough to realize that a fortune was attached to this little child who had fallen into his hands. He kept the lad and his casket, determined that one day he should become rich through them. And so it was this treason on his part that saved everything!"

"The ways of Providence are inscrutable!" murmured the Abbé.

"But the man, the leader of the assassins, did not live long enough to reap the reward of his treachery. Poetic justice caused him to be taken away at the very moment when his goal was at hand. A just punishment!"

Aramis raised his hand.

"Silence, d'Artagnan! The rest of the story is my concern. The lost soul made expiation for all by confessing the truth. Since he has allowed the child to live, may he

rest in peace! Remember, both of you, that without his repentance the grave would have closed forever on the young lord."

A deep sigh came from the old Irishman, but he did not utter a word. It was his turn to listen—and he listened with passionate intensity. D'Artagnan was unable to share his friend's Christian charity, and exclaimed vehemently:

"Bah, why try to give the old rascal any credit? And after all, this box through which the child was to discover his mother only led him into fresh dangers."

"Alas!" sighed the priest.

"You know, Aramis, that the casket nearly caused the destruction of the boy—and of his mother as well."

"His mother!" cried Patrick. "Has he seen her?"

"Yes."

"Does he know her?"

"No!"

"Did she repulse him?" asked the terrified Irishman, turning ghastly white.

D'Artagnan could find no satisfactory answer to this question, and remained silent.

"Monsieur d'Artagnan . . . this woman . . . you know her?"

"I do!"

"Then, tell me her name! I implore you! Oh, have mercy! I will go to her and make her relent."

"Her name!" murmured the Musketeer, half to himself. "That name is a secret that must never escape my lips."

"Oh, this is too terrible, Monsieur! She repulses her child, and you . . . you . . ."

"No, Patrick, she has not repulsed him. She loves him and wishes to help him. And that is why she has bidden me to watch over him."

"What, is he still threatened?"

"More than ever before! But now, with your help, I am sure that we can save him."

"What new dangers, more serious than those that have come before, follow this innocent boy?" asked the old servant sadly of Aramis.

The Abbé lowered his eyes before the man's direct glance.

"Alas," he said, "there is a secret, sacred and inviolable, that holds me too—the secret that has come to me through the confessional!"

The Irishman looked at the two strangers anxiously and a little suspiciously. It suddenly occurred to him that he knew nothing of their real designs. How could he trust these men who had at first been so open and frank, and now maintained a wilful, unfair silence.

"One last word," he said sharply. "You know my young lord, my child . . . will you tell me whether he is aware of his origin? That, at least, I hope no oath makes you hide."

"He does not know who he is, nor where he came from."

"And where is he now?"

"In England."

The candle flickered, on the point of expiring. Patrick broke out into a veritable roar, and bounded toward d'Artagnan.

"In England!" he repeated in a thundering voice.

"Alas, yes, my poor friend. He is in the midst of enemies unknown to him—and to me as well."

The old man had withdrawn into the dark shadows of the room. He spoke slowly:

"I have told you of the castle, of a nest of vipers, and of the old lord who was a traitor to honor and to humanity."

"Yes, the nest is Kildar, and the owner of it is Angus MacDiarmid. But what are the names of the younger vipers?"

"Lord MacLegor, and Daisy, Countess of Suttland."

At this moment a breeze passed through the room, the flame of the candle suddenly expired. D'Artagnan seized a burning twig from the fire, and relighted the candle. He and Aramis were alone! Patrick had disappeared. The Musketeer was about to rush out in pursuit of him, when the soft but firm hand of the Abbé stopped him.

"Let him go, my friend. We shall find him again."

"When?"

"When the hour has come!"

"Where?"

"In England!"

"Why does he flee from us?"

"Because he now knows what he needed to know."

"True, and yet . . ."

"D'Artagnan, your questions are causing us to lose time. Come."

Smiling and calm, Aramis led the aroused Musketeer out of the accursed house, which now returned forever to silence and desolation.

A few hours later the two friends, accompanied by the faithful Bazin, left the Flemish village and started at a gallop for Ostend.

There they embarked for Dover, and reached London with no great difficulty.

As soon as d'Artagnan and Aramis arrived in the capital of Charles I, they entered at once upon the task that lay before them. The most urgent thing for the Musketeer was to deliver the Cardinal's message, and to meet the mysterious Harry MacLegor. Accordingly, he wrote the following note:

Lieutenant d'Artagnan, of the Musketeers, of His Majesty Louis XIII, is at the present moment at The Royal Hunt. *He awaits there the occasion for an appointment with Lord MacLegor, for whom he has a message from Monseigneur the Cardinal-Duke.*

The next task was to discover the whereabouts of the Cavalier. It was obvious that as a result of the time lost by their visit in the Flemish village, the young man must have been in London for several days. The two friends expected to have no difficulty in tracing him. The first step he was likely to take would be to meet his promised protectors—the Duchess of Chevreuse and Lord Montague. Nevertheless, there were two difficulties. In the first place, Tancrède would probably recognize the chaplain who had delivered the precious casket to him—therefore Aramis, on account of his priestly obligations, must try to keep himself from being seen and questioned. The second point affected d'Artagnan. The Cavalier and his friends knew that the Musketeer was in the Cardinal's

service, and were not likely to give him a pleasant reception. Oh, if only d'Artagnan could reveal his connection with the Queen! But, in that matter, he was forced to keep complete silence.

The two friends discussed at length their unfortunate predicament, and finally agreed that they must act in secrecy. It was their duty to lead the youth to safety without themselves stepping forth from the shadow. Above all, they must keep the Cavalier from falling into the fatal hands of the Countess of Suttland and of her brother.

In answer to d'Artagnan's series of questions, Aramis replied:

"Your place is neither with King Charles' favorites nor with the Duchess of Chevreuse, who is well known to be conspiring against our illustrious Richelieu. If you take sides, you will find yourself either tempted to a betrayal or repulsed by those whom you meet."

"Well, in heaven's name, what am I to do?"

"Be patient, headstrong soldier! We have more than one string to our bow. Your position is difficult, but I on the contrary am free and can act."

"Perhaps you'll now say that Lord Montague is one of your friends," remarked d'Artagnan.

"No! . . . but that is not necessary. I have only to pronounce one word to cause all the noble lord's doors to open wide to me."

"Your humor astounds me! It would be an extraordinary pleasure to know what this Sesame is!"

"Yes, just one word," smiled the priest, scratching his nose whimsically. "It's a woman's name. Come, d'Artagnan, has your memory forsaken you? Have you for-

gotten that charming relative of mine—the seamstress of Tours?"

"*Mordi*, you're right! The lovely Marie Michon! Leave at once, dear friend. I'll wait here for the answer from MacDiarmid's son."

Left alone, the Musketeer became plunged in tender reflections. His thoughts centred about the mysterious love which Aramis had had for the gracious but haughty Marie Michon. After an indefinite length of time he was awakened from his reverie by the arrival of a messenger. D'Artagnan seized the proferred letter and broke the seal. It was the reply from the noble lord—a strange, unexpected answer:

Lord MacLegor will be ready to receive His Majesty's lieutenant this evening at ten o'clock in his residence.

"What an unusual hour for an appointment," murmured d'Artagnan.

A trusted servant, continued the letter, *will conduct Monseigneur the Cardinal-Duke of Richelieu's messenger to the proper place.*

"*Mordi*," exclaimed the Lieutenant, "what mysterious caprice is this!"

Before he had further time to ponder the matter, Aramis arrived. He was obviously upset, and sank heavily in a chair.

"Bad news?" asked the Musketeer. "The Cavalier?"

"The Cavalier has disappeared!"

"Hasn't he seen Lord Montague?"

"He has!"

"Well, what's wrong then?"

"A plague upon it! What an unhappy chance!" moaned the Abbé. "This is terrible! I know the facts —but I understand nothing. Certain things are clear. Tancrède arrived in London four or five days ago. He met Lord Montague. What can have passed between them? We might as well admit our ignorance. At any rate, the noble lord is in a rage, and wishes to put the young man away in some discreet place as soon as possible."

"A discreet place. There's no Bastille here!"

"They have the Tower, my friend, and it's just as effective!"

The two friends looked at each other anxiously. This new, incomprehensible disappearance was far from reassuring. What could have happened? Perhaps we can venture to leave d'Artagnan and Aramis for a moment in order to enlighten our readers.

Vauselle, whom we have seen on the Cavalier's trail at Brighton, was the first person to reach London. There the Cardinal's enemies welcomed him with open arms. The escaped prisoner was treated as a brave, persecuted martyr. The sly fox, as might be expected, did not hesitate to take advantage of his favorable reception to begin to lay his snares. At the first opportunity he drew Lord Montague and the Duchess of Chevreuse to one side, and told them of his harrowing experiences. Then suddenly he asked:

"Do you yourselves know or have you heard of a young adventurer who is called the Mysterious Cavalier?"

"The Mysterious Cavalier?" repeated the nobleman. "Yes, Madame the Duchess has spoken of seeing him at the time of the Carmelite episode."

"Madame would be wise," said the spy, "to grant him only a limited confidence. He is one of the Cardinal's agents."

"*He*, such an open, frank youth!" protested the Duchess.

"Oh, that is merely a mask! It is very easy to be deceived by his manner. Perhaps you can remember what happened to you following your departure from the convent of the Carmelites? You were dogged from your first step and finally seized . . ."

"By d'Artagnan!"

"Another well-known agent of Richelieu," observed Montague.

"They are close friends, my lord! And while you, Madame, remained in the Lieutenant's hands, he allowed your young companion to escape, did he not?"

"True! The boy was to deliver my papers in Sedan."

"Ah, what a tragedy! He did, in fact, faithfully deliver them, but he kept several of the most important ones in his own possession. And these papers he delivered to the Red Minister. That explains why I, L'Hermite de Vauselle, was arrested and thrown into the Bastille. And now, Madame, how do you think your innocent little friend is spending his time? In treason once again, *parbleu!* He is, as usual, carrying out the orders of the terrible Richelieu. Imagine it, he has even deceived the Queen herself, and dared play on her kindness to the point that she has entrusted him with a message to you!"

"Oh, horrors!"

"No, be reassured! This message will come straight to its destination. He is bringing it to you, hidden in the lining of his hat. Don't think that he is doing this for reasons of honesty. Isn't it better for him to gain your confidence and thus discover the complete details of your plot—which he will, as before, hand over to his master?"

The proud Englishman and Madame de Chevreuse looked at each other in amazement. Their surprise was beyond words.

"What!" cried Montague. "Does he have the effrontery to come here to *me!* He is a monster!"

"No, no, impossible!" protested Anne of Austria's friend. "I cannot believe in such duplicity and such perverseness in that handsome, straightforward boy."

"Pretty sentiments, Madame," said Vauselle with an insinuating smile, "but it would be dangerous to put them to the test. Well, we'll soon know the truth. There is nothing to do but wait."

This explanation will help the reader to understand the frame of mind the noble lord and the Duchess were in the next morning when the Cavalier arrived in London. Montague was furious and wished to see for himself this monstrous youth. In spite of the Duchess' prayers, he prepared a reception that was painfully different from what Tancrède had expected from these persons on whom his future rested.

When he presented himself at his protector's house, Tancrède was not received by the master himself, but by a secretary who at once engaged him in conversation. His manner was formal and heavy—a manner well calculated to disconcert the eager youth. Montague and Madame de

Chevreuse were concealed behind a tapestry, and could see and hear all that passed. They listened carefully to detect any hidden meaning in his simple words, and sought to discover the mask of the liar in his frank face. In addition, as the Cavalier was strong and impetuous, they had placed men within calling distance in case it should be necessary to use force with their visitor.

At first Tancrède endured his interrogation with a certain amount of patience. But when the nobleman whom he had come to see never appeared and when the man's questions began to take the form of a cross-examination, the Cavalier exploded:

"In France, Monsieur, no matter how great a nobleman may be, he makes it a point of honor not to have his guests received by a subordinate. I am afraid that the much-vaunted English politeness does not exist."

"And yet," insisted the secretary, "you have still not given me sufficient details."

"Enough!" exclaimed Tancrède, whose little patience had been put to too rude a test. "You will be kind enough to say to your master these words: 'She who sent her messenger to you will be informed of the manner of his reception.'"

Having thus vented his anger, he was preparing to leave when he suddenly saw Montague appear from behind the tapestry and approach him angrily. The young man at once lost control of himself. This was too much! He had been spied on! How contemptible!

"My lord," he cried to Montague, who had asked for an explanation, "I refuse to say another word to you! I came here to speak to a gentleman, not to a spy!"

He tried to leave the room. The nobleman stopped him.

"Will you give me the Queen's message?"

"Never! I will deliver it at the proper time, but not to you, whose hands would soil it! Madame de Chevreuse alone shall receive it!"

"Zounds, you have brought this on yourself!"

These words must have been a signal, for immediately men appeared on every side and rushed toward the Cavalier. Tancrède was in no mood to let himself be taken without a struggle. In a few moments the room was a scene of chaos. The enraged lion cub seized any object he could lay his hands on. Chairs, statues, stools, vases, andirons, and candle-sticks went hurtling through the air. Now and then a man would collapse, writhing, upon the floor; sometimes a mirror would crack into a thousand pieces. But in the end superior numbers won.

Ten minutes after the fight began, the Cavalier found himself in the court-yard. He was uninjured, although his sword was broken, his clothes in rags—and his hat had disappeared. As he raised his head, a window was opened. Montague appeared, and, throwing a formless object to his visitor, said banteringly:

"Young man, you were about to forget your hat!"

Paying no attention to the irony, Tancrède seized the hat, and left the court-yard in order to examine the lining. A thousand curses! The Queen's message had been extracted! The Cavalier's heart cried out wildly for revenge. Though without arms, he started to return to the house from which he had been ejected when a hand on his shoulder suddenly stopped him. He turned around. In

front of him was a man whose face was entirely hidden by a high collar and a hat.

"Follow me!" whispered the stranger. "Follow me and you will be avenged!"

Uncertain what to do but realizing that an attack against the house would be useless, the Cavalier allowed himself to be led away.

BEFORE following Tancrède and his strange guide, we must go back eight days and several hundred miles to regain contact with Cyrano, Linières, and Saint-Amant. After the mysterious priest's extraordinary sermon—a sermon in which Christian exhortation and practical advice had been equally mixed—Duretête's prisoners had, as we know, escaped from the improvised jail. As soon as they were mounted on their "borrowed" horses, they took the road to Damascus—that is, the road to Dunkerque, via Saint-Pôl.

But there their difficulties began. It seemed impossible to discover any means to cross the Channel. They spent half a day trying to persuade the various seamen to make the passage. Yet they met what seemed to be a systematic refusal. Their lack of passports drew suspicion on them.

"Let's go to Calais," suggested Saint-Amant.

Alas, under Eustache de Saint Pierre's administration that city was the worst possible place for escaped prisoners.

"Well, what about Boulogne?"

Boulogne, later chosen by Napoleon as the headquarters of his proposed expedition to England, was at this time a modest little city. When they reached Boulogne,

the three friends were mortified to find themselves again checked. Their generous proposals were met with skeptical shrugs of the shoulder and suspicious glances. Even sight of the Spanish doubloons produced a bad effect.

"What are we to do?" groaned the poet. "I think there must be more to this than we know. We'd better drop out of sight."

It was high time for Cyrano to become cautious. As soon as Durêtete had discovered the escape of his prisoners, he had raced to the coast, and raised the alarm against the outlaws. It was by the greatest luck that the three companions had so far escaped capture. Leaving the mouth of the Liane and avoiding the large ports, they wandered along the coast until they reached Saint-Valéry. There they met the same captain who, though they were ignorant of the fact, had assisted the Cavalier. The reappearance of a hoard of Spanish doubloons at first surprised the worthy Picard; but the man feared neither God nor the devil; without asking questions he pocketed the money, and the next day landed his passengers on English soil.

At Brighton they sought information of Tancrède. When they arrived, the famous resort was the scene of great excitement; everyone was talking of a young Frenchman who had taken the London coach, and quarrelling with a fellow-passenger, had left him seriously injured by the roadside.

"*Mordious*, 'tis he!" exclaimed Cyrano.

"Oh, the dear prudent boy! How carefully he follows his instructions!" remarked Linières.

"He's teaching these stupid islanders French with the point of his sword!" said Saint-Amant, exultingly.

Reassured on this point, they reserved places in the coach for that evening. About eight o'clock, when they were on their way to take their seats in the coach, they came upon a group of Puritans chanting psalms. Being little accustomed to such a musical offering, they stopped to observe the spectacle. After the singing was over, a preacher began an open-air sermon directed against the Devil and all his works. But the scene was now less interesting to our three friends, and they were on the point of leaving when a great shout came from someone in the crowd.

"Beelzebub! . . . Satan! . . . The Evil One! . . . There he is! There, there!"

All eyes turned at once on Cyrano. Indeed, it had to be admitted that the Gascon's strange face and outstanding nose had, when seen by torchlight, something of a demoniacal appearance. The poet looked toward the speaker, and recognizing the scowling turnkey of the Bastille, started toward him. But for each step he took forward, Duretête took two backwards. The crowd of Puritans retreated with him.

The situation was becoming embarrassing, and even grotesque. Fortunately a man, attracted by the noise, had come out of the postoffice, and, looking at the three friends, advanced quickly toward them.

CHAPTER XII

AMONG THE PURITANS

"CAN I be mistaken?" exclaimed the stranger, with a strong British accent. "Have I the honor to greet Messieurs de Bergerac, Saint-Amant, and Linières?"

"Yes!" answered the trio.

"Well, gentlemen, I have been waiting for you. Will you be kind enough to follow me?"

But this proposal did not favorably impress the Frenchmen. *Corbac*, were they to be in trouble from the very beginning? What could this over-obsequious Englishman want? Had the Cavalier committed some new blunder?

Saint-Amant alone remained calm. He suggested that the only way to discover the meaning of this extraordinary episode was to comply with this request. Accordingly they followed their guide to a nearby inn. A carriage was waiting in the court-yard. The stranger made a signal for the horses to be harnessed.

"Well, well," said Saint-Amant, trying to get on the good side of their uncommunicative friend, "you seem to do things very quickly in this country."

"Yes, quite! Get in, gentlemen."

"Just a moment! Will you be so kind as to explain on whose orders and for what reason you have waited for us and are now ready to whisk us away?"

"It is to be of service to you."

"Hmm! Then who sent you here?"

"Somebody!"

"Oh, thank you for the information! Now we know!"

"I am acting for a powerful personage who is interested in you."

"*Capédédious!* Well, my friends, what do you say? We are dreaming, I'm afraid!"

"Bah," muttered Linières, "why not do it? We'll soon find out what it is all about."

"Can you at least tell us where we shall go?"

"To London!" answered the stranger.

"*Corbac!*" exclaimed Cyrano, climbing into the carriage. "That's perfect! On to London, my hearties!"

From that moment the three friends went through one unbelievable experience after another; it was like a story out of *The Thousand and One Nights*. On reaching London, Cyrano was conducted, not to a prison, as he had half expected, but to a palatial mansion. After being separated from his friends, he was ushered into a sumptuous waiting-room. He had time to give only a hasty glance at the obvious signs of wealth on every side.

"Will you come this way?" said his guide. "Madame is waiting for you."

Madame? It must be she who had taken an interest in them. Cyrano followed in bewilderment. They passed through a magnificent salon, and entered an enchanting boudoir, in the centre of which a beautiful

lady on a cushioned seat of brocaded gold, awaited him.

"Sit down, sir," she said amiably, looking at him with a friendly glance. "I have heard of your many adventures, and should be delighted if you would tell me of some of your more recent experiences."

His recent experiences? Bergerac's first reaction was to resent this question, but he quickly changed his mind. Captivated by the lady's charming eyes and gracious smile, he sank into a comfortable arm-chair, and began a lively description of the amazing siege which he and his friends had recently withstood. As was to be expected, he omitted from the story anything that had the slightest connection with the Cavalier.

"Good heavens," said the lady when he had finished. "These deeds sound like those of the Knights of the Round Table! I can see that your reputation has not been exaggerated. You are as brave as you are witty, Monsieur de Bergerac."

With these words she arose and extended her hand to the swordsman whose story had so excited her. Then, with the grace of a queen, she took the train of her skirt in one hand and retired.

"*Corbac*, what a pretty blonde," thought Cyrano. "What a radiant creature! But, *sandious*, she didn't tell me anything—not even her name!"

These reflections were interrupted by the arrival of a butler, who opened a double-door, and, bowing respectfully, said:

"If monsieur will be kind enough to advance . . . his friends are waiting for him!"

Cyrano entered a gorgeous dining room, where, at a

table groaning under its burden of food and drink, Saint-Amant and Linières were busily engaged in gastronomic pursuits. They were not worried by their friend's disappearance—to judge, at least, from the happy looks on their faces. After taking the edge off his own appetite, Cyrano looked about him.

"Where are we?" he asked.

"Oh," answered the fat poet, "in a well-appointed house, obviously, for the food, both in quality and in variety, leaves nothing to be desired . . . let us eat!"

"The wines are splendid," said Linières, "and the liqueurs beyond comparison . . . let us drink!"

When they had finally satisfied themselves, the same butler appeared, to conduct the trio to the master of this princely mansion.

"My lord awaits his guests!"

The three men were now beginning to accustom themselves to the extraordinary life in this palace of "The Beautiful Lady with the Golden Hair."

So far nothing had happened to which they could take exception. This time they were led to a plain little study, furnished with old furniture of inestimable value. The master of the house was seated at a desk. He was a fairly young man with an agreeable face—particularly agreeable because it bore certain resemblances to the face of the blond lady whom Cyrano alone had met. And yet at times an unexpected look came into the nobleman's eyes, a look that belied his apparent frankness and one in which a careful observer might have detected a rather sinister maliciousness.

"Gentlemen," he said pleasantly, "I am Lord Mac-

Legor. I had you sought out at Brighton since you were recommended to me as men of great worth because of your courage, your charm, and your wit."

Extending his hand cordially, he added:

"I know who you are. I trust that we shall become good friends."

The gastronomic Saint-Amant and the imbibing Linières still remembered their recent meal, and hastened to shake the proferred hand. But Cyrano hesitated; one thing still bothered him.

"To whom, my lord, do we owe the favor of a recommendation to you? We know only two persons in this country."

"Well, Monsieur de Bergerac, I will let you guess."

"Then it must be Lord Montague."

The young nobleman gave a strange smile, and asked:

"The other person?"

"I am afraid that other person would scarcely be in a position to give introductions. He is a very young, inexperienced fellow. His heart is pure gold and through it he is worthy of the highest rank, but he himself needs protection."

The smile on MacLegor's face increased.

"Gentlemen," he said, bowing graciously, "I must leave you. This house is at your disposal. I beg you to make yourselves completely at home."

"Oh, *mordi*," cursed Cyrano when they were alone, "the dream continues, but still we know nothing! Well, there's our silent guide. What new person are we to meet now?"

"I would gladly return to the dining room," remarked Saint-Amant.

"I too!" agreed Linières. "We have not done sufficient honor to our host's hospitality."

But the butler seemed to have decided otherwise. He opened a door leading into a snug, cosy little salon. A young man arose and advanced toward them with outstretched hands.

"Tancrède!" they cried in unison. "*You*, here!"

After the first confusion was over, explanations were offered.

"And did you, my dearest friends, think me capable of forgetting you?" asked the Cavalier reproachfully.

"Be fair, little one! This strange house is not exactly the place where we expected to find you. Didn't you see Lord Montague?"

"Ah, Montague!"

And Tancrède at once told his astonished friends of the incomprehensible treatment accorded him by the great nobleman on whom they had pinned their hopes. He did not spare any of the details of his ungentlemanly conduct —how his host had spied on him, had had him seized by his servants, and had finally stolen the Queen's message.

"But luckily," concluded Tancrède, "just as I was ejected from the house, I had the good fortune to meet this powerful gentleman who has honored me with his friendship and has allowed me to use his house as a place of safe refuge. It is true, however, that he was led to do this by the insistence of a divine creature who has become a sort of guardian angel to me and promises to make my fortune."

The loyal, charming face of Claire de Cernay passed through Cyrano's mind, as he said:

"You mean the beautiful blond lady? The sister of our host?"

"Oh," cried the Cavalier, divining Cyrano's secret thoughts, "you misunderstand! I could never have any idea of love toward my protectress. She is a mother—a young, tender mother!"

"And Madame de Chevreuse?"

"She, apparently, was associated with Montague's brutal conduct. Since they have seized the message, I am no longer under any obligation to them."

"And so, foolish one, you have passed over to the enemy's camp?"

"Why not? You yourself, my dear Cyrano, once told me that Richelieu was a great man. You were right—he is a great man. He is defending France against the parasites that are sucking her blood. 'Already a certain Cardinal has put the axe to the tree.' Those are the words of a friend of mine, named Cromwell."

"Ah," said Saint-Amant, "that is different—very different!"

Cyrano kicked his friend underneath the table.

"Well, little one, are you now in the Cardinal's service?"

"Who said so? The Cardinal has no business here. Aren't we in the kingdom of Charles I? I expect to act in an honorable fashion and to do my duty toward my kind benefactors."

"*Sandious*, if you are determined to hold to this decision, you will raise a barrier between your past and your fu-

ture! Your anger toward Lord Montague—even though I admit that it is legitimate—is not well-timed. In breaking, through anger, with those whom you were instructed by the Queen to serve, are you not forgetting one person?"

"Whom could you mean?"

"Claire!"

A slight frown clouded the young man's brow. He spoke slowly:

"Cyrano, you are not kind to talk in that way. You know me well enough not to suspect my heart. No, my heart has been given to one woman; Claire has it, and no one else can ever share it. But stop to consider my position, dear friend. I must gain my fortune if I am to be worthy of her. I want to gain it here."

"A woman will help you?"

"Yes, greatly! Do you see anything inconsistent in that? At one time you had an entirely different feeling on the subject. I hope you are not turning Puritan!—Please don't be angry, I am not serious. When we return to France—soon, I hope—I shall be rich and shall no longer carry an obscure name. I want to place both fortune and name at Mademoiselle de Cernay's feet."

"You are determined, little one? Then I will not try to oppose your wishes."

"Yes, I am determined, Cyrano. Reflect a moment. We are here now, and must stay here for some time. How are we to pass the time? Should we make ourselves feel that we are on hostile ground—without friends, protectors, or money? Or should we live a pleasanter life, with charming friends, and money at our disposal?"

The swordsman weighed his light purse. His resistance seemed to have become weaker.

"But," he persisted, "do you propose living a parasite's life?"

Tancrède answered proudly:

"Stop! Again you are mistaken, my friend. We shall be engaged in a serious drama in which our bravery, our experience, and our swordsmanship may be of great use. Not only our swords but your pen will be needed. Important events are about to take place here. We shall be helping to make history. Will you join with us?"

"Just a moment! I should at least like to know whom I am serving!"

"Lord MacLegor—and Liberty!"

Cyrano paused a moment to reflect. MacLegor! Where had he heard that name? It seemed familiar. Oh, yes, of course, the brother of the fascinating blonde!

"And who are our enemies?" he asked.

"Lord Montague—and Tyranny!"

"Liberty . . . Tyranny! Those are strange words!"

"Not here! Remember, we are in England."

Cyrano looked at his two companions. He did not yet know their feelings about the matter.

"Well, what do you think, Saint-Amant?"

"Bah, the food is good—and tyranny is a terrible thing!"

"And you, Linières?"

"Liberty is worth fighting for—and, ye gods, what marvellous wine!"

We have left d'Artagnan waiting to keep his strange appointment with MacLegor, and Aramis pondering the in-

explicable disappearance of the Cavalier which had completely upset all their plans. At the appointed time MacLegor's messenger arrived at *The Royal Hunt*. He seemed disinclined to answer the flood of questions directed at him. Without a word, he led the Musketeer through a series of winding streets. Their destination was not the Scotchman's palatial mansion, but a poor house in a squalid district near the Thames.

Could this repulsive place be the spot chosen by Lord MacLegor to receive the Cardinal-Duke's envoy? Yes, there could be no doubt! D'Artagnan had no choice but to follow his guide. He was conducted into a room filled with people. Their faces were all carefully hidden by high collars and hats well pulled down over their eyes. If a mischievous imp had suddenly removed these disguises, the Musketeer would have had the surprise of his life. He would at once have recognized his former opponents: Cyrano, Saint-Amant, and Linières—the stout defenders of the ruined house in Picardy. And with them was the Cavalier—the subject of all his worries. But it was impossible for him to know this. Yet, on the other hand, *his* appearance had drawn the closest attention.

"There he is!" said Tancrède in a low voice.

"Yes, you are right! The Cardinal's messenger!"

"*Parbleu*, he is probably trying to arrange for our delivery into his master's hands."

"Well, he hasn't got us yet!" was Cyrano's sage rejoinder.

Ignorant of these whispered remarks, d'Artagnan con-

tinued his progress through the crowded room. It was a strange, mixed group of people. There were present a handful of noblemen; Scotchmen of all classes; Presbyterian ministers; prosperous merchants; and many pale Puritans with their close-cropped heads.

"Brr!" muttered d'Artagnan.

He could not but contrast them with the gay, fashionable conspirators on the other side of the Channel, who met in elegant town houses to celebrate in verse and song the ever imminent fall of the great Cardinal. But, *mordi*, these people seemed more grim! There was no sign of gaiety here! Finally he reached a window-seat, and found himself before the handsome, pale, and crafty face of MacLegor. Near the nobleman stood a well-built man with a protruding forehead, piercing eyes, and a dominating smile. His plain, drab clothes stood out in strong contrast to his colorful figure. There was an authoritative quality about him before which even the proud MacLegor seemed to bow.

"Monsieur le Comte d'Artagnan," said MacLegor, introducing the Musketeer to his friend. "Monsieur d'Artagnan brings news from our dear friend, Monseigneur de Richelieu."

The Gascon felt the sharp, searching eyes of the unknown Englishman upon him. Then the stranger said:

"Monsieur d'Artagnan, I feel under great obligation to you for your diligence in the performance of your duty. When you return, I wish you to present Oliver Cromwell's compliments to the Cardinal-Duke."

The Musketeer bowed, without paying particular atten-

tion to the name which was soon to be known throughout the world. His instructions were merely to deliver the letter and to obtain a receipt. Accordingly, he handed his message to the nobleman.

"Here, my lord, is my communication. Will you be kind enough to give me my discharge?"

While MacLegor was writing the receipt, Cromwell had turned, and begun to address the assembly in a vigorous manner:

"Gentlemen, the time has come! At last we can test our strength. Down with the tyrants! Death to Charles the Papist!"

"Hear, hear!"

"My friends, Scotland has already paved the way. With God's help, we can do Him honor by collecting our forces and destroying the throne of the Stuarts. The Highlanders are ready to fire the first shot for the right, for truth and liberty! Let us sing, brethren."

The company then began to raise, in doleful strains, a hymn that began:

We fight for Thee, and for Thy glory, Lord.
Do Thou Thy children victory accord.

The real spirit of revolution filled the room. A sort of sombre joy seemed to move deeply the entire assembly. D'Artagnan shivered. MacLegor then asked for a hearing, and addressed the gathering. He announced that he would leave at once for Scotland. With the money furnished by Richelieu he would be able to open the initial attack against the tyranny of Charles and the domination

of false churches. The Musketeer, while listening, thought:

"Money from the Cardinal—the determined supporter of absolutism! King Charles subsidizes the conspiracy against His Eminence, while His Eminence tries to foment rebellion against the King! Was there ever such a ridiculous situation?"

MacLegor's speech was greeted with cries of approval and threatening murmurs.

"Well, frankly," smiled the disinterested Frenchman, "I think the Cardinal is getting more for his money!"

He suddenly turned around. Cromwell had just touched him on the shoulder.

"Count, your presence here is most opportune. You will now be able to tell the Cardinal what you have seen."

D'Artagnan dropped back a step. This familiarity did not please him.

"Sir, my duty has been fulfilled by the delivery of my message. I must now leave."

Then, bowing courteously, the Musketeer departed.

"*Morbleu!*" he muttered as he passed through the door of the dingy house. "That duty is performed! And into what places and what strange company it has led me! But now I am free! . . . Free, yes, but still with no news of the little Cavalier. Perhaps, if I walk a bit, ideas may come to me."

Meditating thoughtfully, he strolled along the bank of the Thames. Most of the houses in this part of the city were taverns and gin-shops. Having nothing else to do for the moment, the idea occurred to him to enter one of

these dens. As in most taverns in England, the main room of the "pub" was divided into compartments by partitions extending halfway to the ceiling. D'Artagnan seated himself in one of these compartments, and called for a mug of ale—he hated the taste of the stuff, but felt it his duty to conform to the customs of the country. He was about to raise the pewter mug to his lips when the noise of the conversation in the adjoining compartment stopped him.

"*Cordi!* I can't be mistaken. They're speaking French! The rascals must be trying to keep the sailors and longshoremen from understanding what they are saying. . . . *Têdedi*, this is interesting. Unless my ears are no longer trustworthy, they pronounced my name!"

He placed his ear against the partition to hear more distinctly.

"Yes," said a voice, "he arrived yesterday, accompanied by a priest who must be some kind of a military chaplain."

"Well, I hope they don't interfere with our plans."

Who in the world could this be? Intensely excited now, the Musketeer stepped carefully on the bench and peered over the top of the partition. He immediately recognized Vauselle, and his *alter ego* Duretête. Two rough looking men, one tall and pale, the other short and dark, were with them. While d'Artagnan observed the group, the two bravoes engaged in a rapid dialogue in which they described a mission they had just fulfilled. They spoke in a low tone, but the eavesdropper at once gathered that they had been hired to spy on some person of importance and keep him under close surveillance.

"He was seen this evening at the meeting of the Puritans," said one of them.

"With those three rescals from whom he is never separated now," finished the other.

"*Parbleu,*" exclaimed the first speaker, "he is already in the claws of MacLegor and the Countess!"

"Now, who can be the object of this extraordinary espionage?" asked the invisible auditor of himself with a certain amount of anxiety. "I too was at the meeting of the Puritans, even if against my will. But that doesn't mean I'm a partner in the conspiracy. Of whom are they speaking?"

The gaunt, pale spy continued:

"It's good fun to see the four of them bow their heads humbly before Puritanism, Republicanism, and Presbyterianism!"

Loud laughs greeted this sally. Jealous of his colleague's success, the swarthy little man added:

"And other Pharisaisms! But at least it will all have a good result in ridding us of him forever!"

"And of his infernal friend—the commander of five hundred thousand devils!" exploded Duretête, accompanying his statement with a bang of the fist that made the cups totter precariously.

The Musketeer sank back on the bench. An instinctive shudder passed over his body. *Mordi,* how could it have taken him so long to understand the truth! Of course, these scoundrels were talking of the Cavalier Tancrède and of Cyrano de Bergerac! Completely dazed, he kept repeating to himself:

"The Cavalier in the hands of Harry MacLegor—his

worst enemy! . . . The Cavalier in the midst of the Puritans! . . . This is the end! . . . Oh, God!"

And then slowly a ray of hope entered his heart—it was feeble at first, but soon began to expand. In the meantime the conspirators continued to weave their web.

"What a relief if we can once rid ourselves of the man with the two-foot nose!"

Vauselle, still ill at ease for fear Montague would turn upon him if his dastardly treachery should be discovered, now took up the conversation.

"We owe a great deal to Lord Montague's collaboration in this matter! . . . The hour is near at hand. We must act without delay. You know, of course, that the young man is to help in starting the rebellion, and that he is soon leaving for the north in MacLegor's company. No matter what the cost, he must not escape us!"

"Hmm, I understand!" muttered d'Artagnan. "Vauselle is well supplied with gold!"

"Here are your orders and our line of action: on leaving their secret meetings, the Puritans have the wise habit of dispersing in different directions in order to escape the attention of the royal police. The Cavalier will make a detour to return to MacLegor's house, where he now lives."

"Will he be alone?"

"Hmm, he'll probably be with his three accursed friends. But what's the difference? The night will be dark; we are well-armed and in sufficient number to overpower them easily."

"An ambush! Isn't that pretty dangerous?"

"No, not at all! The best thing about the whole affair

is that we shall be acting safely and legally—yes, legally, because we arrest a conspirator and his accomplices! This is done on the order of the Authorities and with their active assistance, thanks to Lord Montague's promised help!"

"I would rather cut their throats on the spot!" grumbled Duretête.

"No, no, be calm, my friends; keep to this plan. Lord Montague never forgets an injury, and his arm is long. I happen to know that an order for incarceration in the Tower will be ready in two or three days. And, Master Duretête, one can not escape from the Tower of London as easily as from the Bastille!"

"The only escape from there is by way of the scaffold!" confirmed the pale bravo.

D'Artagnan had heard enough.

CHAPTER XIII

THE MORTAL INSULT

THERE no longer remained a trace of the Musketeer's previous hesitation. As usual, he had made an immediate decision. Calmly taking up the pewter mug, he sauntered into the adjoining compartment.

"Why, good heavens, what a pleasant surprise!" he exclaimed, raising the mug gaily to his lips to cut short the quite natural terror that his appearance had caused the four rascals. "I am with you in this affair, my hearties, and soon will be able to prove it to you! We'll get that order for incarceration, not in two or three days, but tomorrow! I, d'Artagnan, give you my word on this! Tomorrow night we shall have the young man under lock and key!"

D'ARTAGNAN hastened to acquaint Aramis with the new developments. He had intended to tell him the whole story but it must be admitted that in the course of the narration he changed his mind, and deftly omitted any mention of his own conversation with Vauselle and his satellites.

"Aramis," he said when he had finished the recital, "I must get an official order,—signed by one of His Majesty's

ministers. Couldn't you obtain it for me, today, if possible, through the intervention of Madame de Chevreuse?"

"Perhaps," said the priest, summoning Bazin. "We'll go and see her."

"Will Bazin accompany us?"

"Yes, he too may be needed soon."

As they were about to leave, Aramis stopped, and, looking shrewdly at d'Artagnan, said:

"That night when you were my guest at the vicarage, didn't you speak of a child—a young woman, now—who was the offspring of a liaison between a certain lord and a great lady?"

"Yes—Mademoiselle Claire de Cernay. She is the friend and protectress of our Cavalier."

"The father of this young girl is Lord Montague."

"Good heavens, where did you learn that?"

"Through my 'casuistry'! What has not been told me, I have guessed. And the mother? She is the Duchess of Chevreuse, isn't she?"

The Musketeer remained silent, embarrassed. He had suddenly remembered the mysterious love affair of Aramis and Anne of Austria's beautiful confidante.

"You may speak quite freely, my friend," said the chaplain, smiling. "If the King can forget the injury done the Duke of Orleans, I, who am now of the Church, will not today think of the past—nor of the loves of a Musketeer long since dead to the world."

D'Artagnan, deeply moved, pressed his friend's hand. When they reached the imposing mansion, they were at once ushered into the Duchess's presence—even though it was "Marie Michon," for whom they had asked!

"Aramis!" cried Madame de Chevreuse, her heart beating rapidly.

"Madame," said the handsome Abbé, bowing low, "I have come to present Monsieur d'Artagnan, and to demand two favors of you."

"What are they?" asked the Duchess, extending her hand graciously to the Musketeer.

"The first is to write to Mademoiselle Claire de Cernay these few words which, composed by you, will be in the nature of a command: *'Come at once!'* I would beg you to have this carried by a trusted messenger—not by Monsieur de Vauselle. . . . No, do not ask me why—you will soon know."

"And yet, should I not know?"

"Madame, I speak now to Marie Michon, not to the Duchess of Chevreuse! . . . By a trusted messenger, I said, and this man will be my faithful servant Bazin."

"And what is the other favor you ask of Marie Michon?"

"We should like to meet Lord Montague, of whom Monsieur d'Artagnan has a special request to make."

"Be careful!" the Duchess warned. "Lord Montague is not as easily influenced as Marie Michon. He will insist upon an explanation."

"Have no anxiety, Madame," d'Artagnan hastened to say, smiling to himself at the Abbé's bewilderment. "I am sure that his lordship will be most pleased with my request."

"Come then, gentlemen."

"Sir," began d'Artagnan as soon as he was in Montague's presence, "there is a man who has inflicted a wound upon your honor, and who threatens the security of the

State by plotting against you. I have come to ask you to order his arrest without a moment's delay, and have him clapped into prison where no one can find him or see him —in the Tower of London, preferably."

"What is this man's name?"

"You have met him quite recently—the Cavalier Tancrède."

Aramis stared in amazement.

"Very good," said the nobleman approvingly, at the same moment that Vauselle entered the room through a private door. "I have already obtained an order for imprisonment from His Majesty. Do you know where this little plot is being planned?"

"Our friend can tell you!" replied the Musketeer, waving his hand toward the newcomer.

"Devil take d'Artagnan!" thought Vauselle, little expecting to find himself in this company. "He has beaten me to it. Lucky I didn't wait any longer!"

Advancing toward Montague, he began his explanation in a loud voice:

"Monsieur d'Artagnan is quite right—I have news of the actions and conduct of the young traitor, my lord. I know where he lives, and where he goes each evening—to a little meeting-house near the Thames. I have been keeping watch on this place where he and the other conspirators meet. Every evening I have placed my picked and loyal followers on guard in the neighborhood. Tonight, if you so desire, the Cavalier will be in our hands."

"Yes, that is for the best," decided Lord Montague, pleased with the turn of events. "It's about time to give these Roundheads a lesson. Monsieur d'Artagnan will

help you. He knows where he is to take the prisoner. You are to obey him as you would me."

He proceeded to give the following written order to the Musketeer:

The Cavalier Tancrède is to be taken to the Tower, and confined in the strictest secrecy.

The visitors were then dismissed. Aramis was completely crushed. On reaching the street, he got rid of Vauselle, and, trembling involuntarily, began to reproach the smiling officer.

"D'Artagnan, I no longer know you! How can you turn yourself into the most damnable of police officers and start your new profession by betraying the Cavalier?"

"*Cadédis*, my good fellow," answered the light-hearted Musketeer, "these rascals were preparing to injure our wild young colt. I had only one way of snatching him from the jaws of the wolves—to join with them, fight with them, and, under the pretext of giving them my assistance, put Tancrède in a place of safety. Once in the Tower he will no longer be able to commit his follies."

The priest seized his companion's hand warmly.

"Oh, my dear friend, my brave, wonderful d'Artagnan! . . . I am furious."

"Furious? Have I not done well, then?"

"Yes, heaven help us! But I'm furious just the same —furious that it was you, not I, who had such a brilliant idea!"

"Ah-ha!" laughed the Cardinal's envoy. "For once your 'casuistry' did not rise to the occasion!"

D'Artagnan spent all of that afternoon joyously arranging the details of the nocturnal expedition—after all, hadn't

Lord Montague designated him leader? He took as much pleasure in planning the Cavalier's incarceration as he would formerly have taken in helping him to escape. Now that his mind was at ease, his southern light-heartedness returned, and he was delighted by the unexpected turn in the situation.

He already knew several of the men whom Vauselle had collected from various parts of London. But he and Vauselle agreed that, as these men were to be under his command that night, it would be better for him to meet them all, and pass them under review. D'Artagnan discovered nothing in them worthy of notice, although his attention was attracted to the two men whom he had seen the previous evening in the company of Vauselle and Duretête. The spies took great pleasure in telling of the way they had plundered the Cavalier on the trip from Brighton to London and had finally forced him to draw his sword. But they discreetly refrained from any reference to the chastisement the young Frenchman had administered to one of them. Duretête entered into the conversation with great volubility.

"That wretched jailer," thought d'Artagnan, "is certainly unlucky. His presence here should, by rights, bring about the downfall of his mortal enemy; actually, without knowing it, he will help save him. *Sandis*, Aramis was right: the ways of Providence are inscrutable—because we are too ignorant to understand them! I should never have thought it useful to have so large a number of enemies. 'One enemy may ruin you,' Aramis once said, 'but more than one may help you.' Ah, my friend is a wise man!"

The Musketeer was in high spirits and so could act

graciously toward Vauselle, and even say a pleasant word to the bull-dog Duretête. The former turnkey of the Bastille suggested that it might be wise to see MacLegor once more.

"There's no use going before tomorrow," replied d'Artagnan. "If you saw him today he might change his mind. He has already agreed to our plans."

Rubbing his hands contentedly, he said to himself:

"Tomorrow? Ah, what a happy day! MacLegor will be on his way to Scotland and the Cavalier will be safe behind the massive bars of the Tower of London!"

Evening came at last. Each man was at his post, waiting. A soft breeze blew from over the Thames whose sluggish muddy waters could be seen at the end of the street. D'Artagnan, wondering whether the youth who had caused him so much trouble would really appear, inspected his troop for the last time. Everything was in order—at least as far as he could observe, for each man except himself was masked. His only surprise was occasioned by the sight of the two whom Vauselle had already hired to dog the Cavalier. He had not remembered that the one was such a giant and the other so tiny. But there could be no doubt about it—they were in their proper places and had answered to the signal agreed upon.

All went well! The Cavalier alone was still missing, before the play could be begun. Suddenly the leader of the ambush saw Aramis. It had been decided that the chaplain was not to join in the game. But wishing to be sure of Tancrède's coming, he had thought it best to precede his friend.

"May heaven help me," he whispered into his friend's

ear, "but I don't know what's wrong about my appearance today. At any rate, I've been followed since morning by a suspicious looking little man, who seems always half drunk. But I finally managed to lose him."

"And the Cavalier?"

"He is coming, quite alone, brave boy. He doesn't seem in the least suspicious."

As he finished these words, Tancrède's figure could be seen in the distance. Not wishing to have his followers take the first step, d'Artagnan came out of his corner and advanced toward the newcomer.

"Sir, I arrest you in the name of the King!"

"The King?" repeated the young man, stopping quickly. "What King? Mine or yours? The King of France or of England?"

Then, recogniznig his antagonist, he added almost gaily:

"Why! Zounds! No, I can't be mistaken—Monsieur d'Artagnan! I'm delighted, perfectly delighted to meet you, dear Lieutenant. I was waiting for you!"

Tancrède quickly rid himself of his coat, and stood calmly with drawn sword in his hand. Vauselle, observing this action, rushed forward, shouting:

"To the rescue! Montague!"

This was the prearranged signal for the mercenaries to advance. But, before a step had been taken, someone in the midst of the troop thundered in a stentorian voice:

"To the rescue! MacLegor!"

Throwing aside his mask, the taller one of the two Brighton bravoes rushed out from the crowd. Flourishing a powerful sword he had soon cleared a space about the Cavalier.

"Monsieur de Bergerac! Monsieur de Saint-Amant! To the rescue!"

"I'll wager you weren't expecting this!" said the tall man amiably.

Though put out for a moment, d'Artagnan soon recovered, and took the upper hand, saying:

"Thank God! It suits me better like this. Close in!"

He at once prepared to lead his men to the attack, when —horror of horrors!—the street was suddenly invaded by another band of armed men, Lord MacLegor's followers!

"What does this mean?"

"This means, Monsieur d'Artagnan, that for two days you have been followed in your every action by a blood-hound infinitely superior to the worthy Vauselle."

"Oh, the little drunkard who dogged me today!" muttered Aramis.

"Congratulations, a perfect portrait!" cried Saint-Amant with a loud laugh. "Yes, he's our blood-hound! The noble Linières has learned of all the secret meetings between Montague, Vauselle, and the others. With this information in our hands, we have been bold enough to take the places of two of your hired assassins—they were quite ready to sell themselves to the highest bidder."

There was no use to say more. The two forces began the attack at once, and each man defended himself as best he could. Cyrano's voice could be heard above the deafening din:

"And now, at last, here are we, the followers of MacLegor, face to face with the Montagues!"

"MacLegor!" shouted d'Artagnan. "Ah, the villanous ras . . ."

The priest swiftly put his hand over the speaker's mo whispering:

"If you love me, not a word! Once that secret escapes, the Cavalier is ruined forever!"

"*Mordious*, and so you, the servants of the Cardinal, thought you would seize us!" continued Cyrano's sarcastic voice. "You had planned to ensnare us in a cowardly trap, eh, without giving us a chance to defend ourselves? Ha! you find us with drawn swords, and ready to cut your hired scoundrels into bits!"

Indeed, Vauselle's mercenaries, rudely assaulted and little anxious to face the music, were beginning to give way. D'Artagnan, now supported by Aramis alone, continued to fight with blind rage.

"Fools!" he cried. "Fools, you don't know what you're . . ."

An iron hand grasped him by the arm.

"Silence! Are you bent on ruining him!"

"Oh, Aramis, my only friend, these fools will ruin him too! I can't hold in any longer, do you understand? This is too agonizing!"

"I find no difficulty in keeping silent."

"My secret is strangling me. Good God, I'm choking!"

"Fight, don't talk! Swallow your words, d'Artagnan, and the fit will pass."

The two comrades continued the unequal struggle, the lightning flashes of their swords commanding respect.

"Good heavens, what are they doing now!" exclaimed the Abbé, resting his sword for a moment. "Someone gave a command, and at once MacLegor's followers

pped fighting, and now have begun to retreat, taking ancrède with them."

"Cavalier!" cried d'Artagnan, imploringly.

"Adieu," came the youth's ironic voice. "Adieu, Monsieur the Lieutenant. Present my sincerest compliments to Lord Montague. If he still wishes to amuse himself by trying to capture me, tell him to follow me to Scotland!"

"Monsieur Saint-Amant, will you listen to me?"

"Farewell, my friend," said the famous gourmand in a sad voice. "We excepted better things of a man of your metal. You don't fit into the rôle of a police officer. Take my advice and return to France where you make a more favorable impression!"

"Monsieur de Bergerac, you, *you* at least, will not refuse to fight with me?"

"Good-bye, Monsieur d'Artagnan," said the Gascon in a grave voice, putting his sword in its scabbard.

An agonizing sweat broke out on the face of the poor Musketeer, half insane under this avalanche of insults. Pale as death, his teeth clattering as if he were stricken with fever, he sought to comprehend this horrible nightmare. Cyrano continued to speak:

"Monsieur, I do not wish to leave you without explaining my present conduct. We know each other, and have met in battle in happier days. You were then a soldier and a gentleman. I crossed swords with you in honorable conflict. I can still remember an occasion when you treated me as a school-boy. It was, if my memory holds true, in front of the Carmelites, and you then fought with your sword in its scabbard in conformance with some silly oath.

"Today, alas, you are no longer the soldier, no longer the gentleman. It is I, now, who keep the sword in the scabbard and refuse to fight. I have not made any kind of oath—please understand that. But honor compels me. I cannot fight with a policeman, a spy!"

Under the lash of this terrible insult—doubly terrible because unwarranted—the Musketeer rushed forward. But Cyrano calmly folded his arms. D'Artagnan stopped short, trembling. He had nearly killed an unarmed opponent.

"Monsieur de Bergerac," he gasped slowly, "you have just committed an unforgivable act of cowardice! Some day—soon, I trust—you will remember this injury, and will pay for it with tears of blood!"

Cyrano had already rejoined his friends and passed these threatening words off with a shrug of the shoulders. The street, so alive but a few moments before, was now deserted. D'Artagnan, crushed as he had never been, staggered to a street-lamp. Aramis stood motionless near him, not daring to utter a word, not daring to try to soften this ghastly, unmerited blow aimed at a noble heart. The Abbé was praying fervently. But the Musketeer's iron frame had gone through such trials as this before. Adversity could not break him. When he finally raised his head he had regained control of himself.

"God has decided against us, Aramis! We have lost our one chance!"

As if in answer to this melancholy statement, a voice from the shadows cried:

"Not at all, gentlemen! God has decided, it is true, but in your favor!"

"Patrick!"

"Yes, it is I! I have seen all, heard all."

"Then why didn't you speak—you who alone could have spoken?"

"Because *he* was hidden near here, in the shadows."

"Who in the world are you talking about?"

"What, don't you guess? *He*, the traitor, MacLegor! There he goes now!"

"Praised be God!" sighed Aramis, raising his eyes to heaven. "I was sure that we did not yet know all."

He shook his fist in the direction of the retreating nobleman, saying:

"The first victory is yours! But we shall see you later, and then will come our revenge!"

"Yes, in Scotland," murmured Patrick, "at the castle of Kildar!"

CHAPTER XIV

DAISY, COUNTESS OF SUTTLAND

In entering MacLegor's service, the Cavalier had unquestionably taken a decisive step. His youthful heart was full of ardor and hope, now that he was a partner in the Roundhead conspiracy. In this way he hoped to obtain revenge upon Montague, his so-called protector, who had rebuffed him so abominably.

And yet, although he was bound heart and soul to his new protectors, the dangers were perhaps not as great as had been imagined by his unknown defenders—Patrick, and the two Musketeers who had once been members of the famous quartet of Monsieur de Treville's company. The truth was that Harry MacLegor was ignorant of the Cavalier's origin, and had no thought of enquiring into it. Ambitious to a supreme degree, he had but one aim in life: to climb higher and become richer and richer. He was so obsessed by this dream that he had paid only slight attention to the young stranger whom Daisy, his sister, had introduced to him.

"Bah!" he had thought, nodding his head disdainfully, after the manner of a man immune to certain temptations of the flesh. "This is only some new caprice of my dear sister. Her nature seems to require affection. This will not last long!"

And this was the least propitious time in the world for MacLegor to begin a genealogical study of his new secretary. He had audaciously raised the standard of revolt and now must hasten to place the inaccessible range of Scottish mountains between King Charles' wrath and his own person. He had at first demurred against giving the young man such a high position as private secretary, but Daisy, understanding Tancrède's pride, had insisted.

Accordingly Lord MacLegor took his sister's new friendship philosophically and congratulated himself that the recruit had brought with him important reinforcements in the persons of his intrepid band of followers, Cyrano, Saint-Amant, and Linières. This latter specimen, it is true, had caused him some misgivings on account of his ridiculous figure. But this first impression soon turned into a favorable one when he discovered how uncannily clever the little tippler was in matters of espionage. Before beginning the journey to the Highlands, MacLegor had entrusted to the three men the delicate task of covering the retreat of the Puritans. This rear-guard duty, of course, necessitated their temporary separation from the Cavalier.

MacLegor's feeling toward his new secretary was, then, quite simple and innocent. It was a somewhat different feeling that his sister had. The Countess of Suttland, as we may remember, left Paris hastily as the result of the Cardinal's urgent demands. Her adventurous nature welcomed such a dramatic mission. But at first His Eminence's enigmatic instructions had worried her greatly. Richelieu had merely mentioned the departure of an unknown youth—a certain Cavalier Tancrède—for England. Daisy, whose conscience was none of the clearest,

had at once concluded that the powerful statesman must know a good deal more about the young man than he pretended. If it was to her, the daughter of the old Lord MacDiarmid, that he entrusted this duty, then he probably thought that the youth was bound to her by some mysterious tie.

The long hours spent in her carriage as she passed through the green fields of France had given her time to reflect. Her final conclusion was reassuring. No, Lord Buckingham's child could not be alive! Through what miracle could he have escaped from the hands of the assassins whom she and her brother had sent to Flanders to kill him? No, it was impossible! There was no reason to worry on that score. The child was ten times dead and the grave would never release its dead! Letters from the Cardinal which she received in the course of her journey confirmed her in this conclusion. The great French minister was never interested in personal feuds, no matter how terrible, provided they had no repercussion on national affairs. It was now obvious to her that this young man must be a dangerous enemy of the State.

Daisy, entirely at ease, crossed the Channel in that calm manner which belongs to the English alone—the greatest race of travellers in the world. She stopped at Brighton to effect a meeting with Cromwell, an important member of Parliament. There she accidentally saw the Cavalier, and this meeting caused her to be more reassured than ever.

At this point one question comes up: did the Countess of Suttland love the valiant, warm-hearted youth? It is very difficult to give an answer—she herself would have

been unable to say. She felt certain strong emotions of protection, friendship, and tenderness toward the Cavalier. But this feeling was almost a maternal one. An unreasonable jealousy seized her when he left her, even if only for a few moments. He must belong to her, to her alone. Was this the beginning of love? Who knows? The fickle goddess employs very strange stratagems. But if it was love, the English lady did not realize it herself.

The young woman had always, as everyone knew, taken full advantage of the freedom of English tradition concerning the female sex. But her flirtations had been of short duration, and had never really touched her heart. While still a young girl, although already a famous beauty, her father, Lord MacDiarmid, had given her in marriage to the Earl of Suttland, a wealthy and powerful nobleman. The honeymoon of this ill-sorted couple ended in a bloody episode, the true details of which were never known. One evening the earl's body was brought back to his residence, soaked with blood as well as with wine. It was said that he had been killed in a drunken orgy.

Daisy, Countess of Suttland, though still young, thus found herself the possessor of a distinguished name and a handsome fortune. Like all the members of her family, she possessed immense ambition and an inordinate love of money. In consequence her widowhood was most agreeable to her, as it enabled her to enjoy both place and fortune. She soon became the leader of a brilliant group in which anything was permissible so long as appearances were duly considered. Her first act had been to install her less wealthy, but equally ambitious brother Harry, in

her house as a kind of formal protector. It was MacLegor's arrival which had caused the house to become the centre of the conspiracy of which Cromwell, almost against his will, was the leader.

It was at this juncture when her fickle fascinating heart still remained untouched that Tancrède arrived. In the course of the many long talks which she had contrived to arrange with her new protégé, she had not failed to question him about his boyhood. But the Cavalier, as we know, was very discreet when the secrets of other persons were concerned, and he answered always evasively. The few statements he allowed to escape greatly intrigued his protectress.

Now while they were fleeing at a furious pace toward Scotland, Daisy still felt, after endless conversations and certain delicate overtures, that the Cavalier was only a young soldier of fortune, raised in a haphazard manner among soldiers and at the present time seeking his fortune under her ægis.

The first part of the retreat was made in forced marches for fear of pursuit. But as they neared the country of Lord MacLegor, where the new ideas of revolution and rebellion had already taken root, they were able to move more slowly. Leaving the low-lands, they entered a wonderful country where nature had shown the beauty that she could shower on the roughest of scenery. There were jagged peaks, separated by narrow gorges; thick forests, through whose gloomy depths one passed only to come suddenly upon dazzling waterfalls; or calm, deep waters, whose tranquil surfaces hid treacherous currents. Sometimes the paths were so steep and narrow that the riders

had to dismount and lead their terrified horses by the bridle.

It was a journey full of stirring surprises for everyone, but above all for a youth of sixteen years. Tancrède felt that he was moving in a dream, passing through an enchanted fairyland. In the evening they would find shelter in the hut of some poor farmer, usually one in sympathy with Roundheads. It was, of course, impossible to try to progress by night because of the deep chasms that yawned at the side of the narrow trails.

The fascination of this romantic scenery began to have its effect on Tancrède. It was his duty to ride alongside the Countess's litter which was carried by mules, whose tinkling bells helped to enliven the journey. He could not but admire the young woman, dressed in an elegant yet sensuous manner, as she lay stretched out on the cushions in complete relaxation. At times he felt her dreamy tantalizing eyes rest upon him. And when his eyes crossed hers a sudden warm glow crept over his body. Not that the youth was at all alarmed! He was safe against any such attacks through the image of Claire de Cernay that lay engraved upon the inner-most tabernacle of his heart.

One evening near the end of their journey they made a halt at an old castle which, though half in ruins, still retained enough of its former splendor to afford passable comfort. MacLegor's followers installed themselves in the delapidated great hall and prepared to roast on an improvised spit the different varieties of game they had been able to procure by fair means or foul. But they were suddenly disturbed in their activities by the arrival of a galloping horseman.

The newcomer had a huge head, a thick, squat body; he rode a farm horse that was panting furiously and gave off great clouds of steam from its flanks. The man said that he had come straight from London. He had left the morning after the attempted ambush, bringing with him important letters for MacLegor and his sister. With dogged determination he had pursued stage by stage the group of Puritans whom Charles had now proclaimed rebels. Two horses had expired under his heavy frame. He had stolen fresh mounts from unguarded pastures, and without stopping to rest had at last reached his goal. Only one thing had kept him going: hate!

The man was, as we might have suspected, Duretête! A servant hastened to lead him to the brother and sister. He immediately delivered the letters, and without stopping to take the sleep that he so obviously needed, remounted his horse and left, crying:

"I must complete my work!"

The messages were from the Cardinal. Those addressed to the nobleman contained certain information and advice pertaining to political matters. But it was nothing of this sort that his sister received. Taking advantage of her brother's preoccupation, Daisy broke the seals of her letters, and started to read the contents.

She had not reached the third line before a singular emotion began to trouble her. She noticed that Harry, though pretending to be engrossed in his own correspondence, was looking at her questioningly above his papers. She tried to hide her agitation and retired to her room, saying cheerfully:

"Nothing of any importance!"

But once in her room and free from observation, she could give way to her emotion. She re-read with great care the lines that Richelieu had written. She was scarcely able to control herself and her sensitive face was at times disfigured by most unusual passions.

His Eminence's communication was lengthy. It had been written following the receipt of the news that his trusted bloodhounds had been so completely duped in Picardy. The Cardinal had now allowed his wrath to get the better of him and had decided to burn his bridges. The letter gave the appearance of being written in the cold calculating manner that he always employed in his subtle political intrigues. There was nothing on the surface that did not seem perfectly natural and obvious. But underneath, like the trail of a venomous serpent, ran the course of his poisonous instructions.

We shall not give in its entirety this letter which was both concise and rambling. It was a strange combination of the two predominant qualities in a man who had the most brilliant mind of his century. We will content ourselves by furnishing a paraphrase:

The Countess, suggested the great statesman, was a woman of fertile, clever mind. He was sure that she had taken the first opportunity to meet the young man of whom he had spoken. And doubtless a closer relationship had followed.

If that were, as seemed likely, the case, no time was to be lost. She must win her way into the Cavalier's confidence and extract certain secrets from him. Act at once, and, above all, succeed! He did not venture to suggest how she was to proceed. He confidently left that to her.

She was a woman, young and beautiful. . . . He begged her to use to the utmost that power which no man could resist. It was possible that she had a Bible near at hand, and might be amused by re-reading the great deeds of Judith and Delilah.

"Why, the impertinent scoundrel!" thought Daisy, unable to keep from smiling. "Has he forgotten that he is writing to a Puritan!"

The letter continued, approximately, as follows:

I must give the Countess the following information, if she does not already possess it. The origin of this young man is very uncertain, but he is under the protection of two powerful women. These two women, through the force of circumstances, do not see each other often these days, but the mere joining of their names is enough to cause grave disturbances. As the Countess may have guessed, I refer to Queen Anne of Austria and Marie de Chevreuse, her former intimate friend.

The relations between these women have been maintained in recent times, it seems, through the assistance of Mademoiselle Claire de Cernay—a young and beautiful favorite of our Queen. Does Madame de Suttland have any doubts as to who this girl is? Our information would seem to point to her being the issue of a transitory love of the warm-hearted Duchess Marie for an Englishman who was a companion of the Duke of Buckingham. . . .

Claire de Cernay, therefore, is but one of the consequences of the affair in the garden at Amiens, *from which the Queen was able to escape unharmed, thanks to the gen-*

erous lie of her friend, who took all the blame on herself. . . .

The Countess is advised not to forget any of the instructions contained in this letter. It is her duty to reflect on the possible harm that this Cavalier might do to other persons. The Countess should carry out those practical measures which His Eminence, alas, is in no position to take!

After finishing her careful perusal of the letter, the young Countess was lost in reflection.

"Come," she said, trying to adjust herself to the import of this sinister communication, "there's something Italian here. That Monsieur de Mazarin will take extreme measures."

In the bottom of her heart she was tremendously upset. She refused to believe in such a cruel trick of fate. Something in her continued to struggle for the handsome, honest youth. No, it was impossible! It must be some coincidence, some mistake!

She stealthily walked toward the partition which separated her room from the little chamber occupied by her brother's secretary. A small window, covered by an old silk curtain, occupied the centre of the partition. With a trembling finger Daisy slowly raised the heavy hanging, and peered into the adjoining room. Tancrède was alone, sitting at a table, and by the light of a pale lamp was copying letters for MacLegor.

The finger released the curtain, which once again assumed its proper position. The Countess stood still, uncertain what to do.

"We'll see!" she finally decided.

She advanced toward the door, opened it, and calmly walked into the young man's room. Tancrède was not in the least surprised. He had long been accustomed to Daisy's frank actions. After all, weren't they just good friends?

"How late you are working!" she remarked pleasantly.

She seated herself on an old moth-eaten couch, upon whose cushions her ancestors might have exchanged words of love. She then motioned to the Cavalier, who at once obeyed and sat down beside her. The moment seemed well-chosen. Gently caressing the youth's hand, she began to sound him:

"Is it possible that at your age, Tancrède, you have never felt the soft emotion of love?"

Caught by the almost maternal kindness of her words and her expression, Tancrède succumbed to her spell. He, who was usually so careful to let none of his secrets escape, opened his lips and pronounced the one word—"Claire!"

"Is she not the Queen's friend?" asked the Countess, deciding to strike at once.

It was a rash step. She had advanced too quickly. The youth immediately became mute and refused to be drawn out any further on the subject. Daisy, trying to reassure him, approached the delicate question of Claire from a different angle:

"Alas," she sighed sadly, "before you can hope to realize your charming dream, my dear Cavalier, you must have a name and a dignified position."

Tancrède smiled confidentially.

"I shall win them, I am sure of it! I have only to be patient."

She restrained herself from answering, thinking to herself:

"What possible hopes can he have?"

It seemed unwise to stop after she had gone so far. She became even more persuasive. He must not think that her interest in his future rested on curiosity alone. She wished to help him as if he had been her little brother, her child! This display of sentimental affection resulted in his saying:

"I am most anxious, Madame, that you should not have the idea that I am filled with conceited hopes. No, there is something very serious beneath my words. I trust in the future because I have been promised a great name and a great fortune. And, above all, I have confidence in my Star!"

This last word caused the Countess to turn pale; she had difficulty in concealing her emotion. She had always preserved a certain indistinct memory of the significance of a Star. Had the Cavalier spoken about it accidentally? She had no means of further ascertaining the truth, but a torturing doubt filled her heart.

And then, in a truly feminine manner, she realized that her anxiety did not centre upon the Star, but on an entirely different subject. Yes, for the first time in her life she was suffering the bitter pangs of jealousy! Her heart was bleeding from a new, unexpected wound.

He loved another! Pride, ambition, love—all were wounded. She at last understood that she was the victim of this little game of maternal love which she had invented in order to pass the days more pleasantly.

CHAPTER XV

A CAPTIVE OF LOVE

Love is not to be trifled with. The Countess of Suttland was in love! Would she now weep?

Returning to her room, the beautiful young Countess threw herself on her bed, and tore at the pillows in her rage. What! Should she let a mere child, inexperienced and illegitimate, steal Tancrède from her, the mere sight of whose face caused her to tremble with passion?

"Oh, never, I swear it! He shall love me! Yes, it is my will, he must love me first! And afterward? Well, when this passion is assuaged, perhaps I'll find something else to amuse me!"

This determination enabled her to regain some degree of self-composure. She would soon have the Cavalier and his secrets at her mercy! The Countess had begun to rearrange her toilet, which had been somewhat disturbed by the violent crisis through which she had passed, when she felt a hand on her shoulder. Turning around sharply, she found herself in her brother's presence. She had not heard him knock, and in her present frame of mind, she was surprised and irritated by the liberty he had taken.

"What are you doing here? What could have induced you to make this visit?"

"A perfectly proper visit, my dear Daisy, and one to which no one could take exception. If you wish an explanation, here it is: I was about to retire and decided to come to say good-night. I knocked discreetly on the door but there was no answer. Suddenly the thought came to me that you might be ill and unable to answer, and so I entered. I regret having been an unwilling witness to the emotion that has so shaken you. May I ask, dear sister, what disturbing news has so upset you?"

With swift decision, the young woman drew the letter from its envelope. Motioning Harry to approach, she placed a finger to her lips, and said simply:

"Read this!"

He took a long time to peruse the weighty document.

"To whom does the Cardinal refer?" he finally asked, turning the letter over in his fingers.

She lowered her eyes, afraid to betray her secret.

"You will know in good time."

"Well, what is there in this letter to throw you into such an hysterical condition?"

She looked at him in surprise. How could he be so blind?

"Did you read it carefully, Harry? Could you have overlooked the part which mentioned Queen Anne and the Duchess of Chevreuse in the garden at Amiens?"

"Yes, I read that. What then?"

"I must help you. Complete the quartet: Lord Montague and . . ."

"The Duke of Buckingham!" exclaimed MacLegor with a shudder.

"Speak lower, Harry. It would not be wise to let this secret be known. Well, there were two children. One was Claire de Cernay, the girl born to the Duchess of Chevreuse. The other was the Queen's and . . ."

"The other!" interrupted the brother in horror, his teeth chattering violently. "The other cannot injure us. He is dead! You know that as well as I do!"

"I thought I did! Today I am not so certain!"

"Damnation! the Duke of Buckingham's son alive! That would be ruin, the destruction of all the hopes we have so carefully cherished."

"The blame can attach only to our father and to you yourself. You held the child. Why did you allow him to escape with Patrick? . . . Perhaps he too is alive!"

"A thousand curses! can the soldiers have betrayed us?"

"Why not? You should have acted yourself, you should have destroyed the persons and the papers that might some day return to cause our downfall. . . . But no, you are a coward! You are afraid of words and action alike!"

"And you? What would you have done?"

"I?" she answered fiercely. "I should have killed them —strangled both of them, the child and Patrick, with these very hands, if I had been a woman instead of a little girl at that time! Yes, I swear to heaven that I would have done it! And today you would not stand there trembling like an old woman before your sister! A coward, afraid of ghosts!"

The woman had become an unchained tigress, a hideous

beast hidden beneath the exterior of an angel. In her wild rage she laughed insultingly and menacingly at her brother.

"He must die!" groaned MacLegor.

"At *your* hands, I suppose! Ha! In that case he can rest in peace. Our father, shaking with fear, buries himself in the recesses of his castle of Kildar; weakened in mind, he now lives only in his memories and his remorse! And as for you, who have already let him escape twice, really, I don't think you would better risk a third attempt, darling brother."

Exasperated by the biting sarcasm, he grasped his sister's wrists, crying:

"This time I will never hesitate. If I once find him, he is a dead man!"

Snatching herself from his rough grasp, Daisy looked at him with a mock expression of pity. She knew that he was now at the exact point to which she had wished to lead him. Straightening out her dress she said casually:

"Yes, but before you can find him you must know who he is!"

"Oh, Daisy, you are cruel! I will look for him throughout the entire world."

"That's not necessary. I know him!"

"You!" gasped the dumbfounded MacLegor. "God, at last I see! It's *he!*"

This sudden, almost miraculous, revelation surprised even the Countess. The nobleman pointed to the partition behind which Tancrède, calm and trusting, was finishing his long evening's work.

Daisy rushed upon her brother and looking him straight in the eyes said fiercely:

"He? Perhaps! But I forbid you to touch a hair of his head."

"Are you mad?"

He suddenly fell back a step. Now he understood! A cold smile appeared on the lips of the emotionless Puritan as he asked:

"Do you love him?"

"Keep quiet. You have no right to ask that question. From the very beginning we have had a perfectly definite line of demarcation between our respective spheres. I do not meddle in your political intrigues, and I forbid you to interfere with my amorous ones. I will do with this youth what I like! He is mine, not yours! Remember, always remember, I will act when the time comes!"

Harry, conquered by the subtle relentless force in her, bowed his head.

"If you are still in doubt of his identity," he said, "you have a sure means of learning."

"Indeed! And what is this Open-Sesame?"

"Merely a sign—a Star."

"A Star!" she murmured, not daring to believe her ears.

"Have you forgotten that? During his proud days as the King's favorite, Buckingham chose a Star as his symbol. Anything which he held sacred and priceless carried that same sign."

"Do you mean that he would have branded his child as if he had been an animal?"

"Yes, because that Star was the most certain means of identifying the child who came into the world as a result of the meeting at Amiens. And accordingly, whoever is

Lord Buckingham's son bears over his heart the impress of the paternal Star!"

With these words he kissed his sister's hand, and retired. As soon as she was left alone the Countess remained plunged in deep reflection that lasted for more than an hour. Finally, she reached a decision:

"A Star over his heart! Well, I'll soon know!"

One of the finest things about women of the Countess of Suttland's type is that no amount of trouble or fatigue affects their radiant beauty. The Countess spent that entire night without sleep, reflecting on the best methods of obtaining the results she now desired. But when she left her room the next morning her beauty was more dazzling than before. The Cavalier was quite overpowered by it as she took her place in the litter.

This was to be the crucial day! The troop of Puritans had nearly reached the end of their journey. They had now only to cross the high barrier of mountains that separated them from the wild domain where the clan of MacDiarmid was all-powerful. After passing this, brother and sister need no longer fear pursuit.

As the march progressed Daisy was insistent upon the Cavalier's constant attendance and showed herself more charming in their confidential chats than she had ever been before. She employed every possible device to achieve her conquest: wit, gaiety, aimiability, and all the countless arts stored in her feminine arsenal. Her efforts were crowned with success. The young man had been accustomed to think of her as his "little mother." Now she was also something different, a veritable enchantress, and the Cav-

alier allowed himself to indulge in a thousand wild fancies. When the sun went down he was, though ignorant of the fact himself, thoroughly prepared for the further advances of this new Salome.

They found shelter for the night in an old and somewhat ruinous hunting lodge. As on the previous evening either by chance or premeditation Tancrède found himself placed in a room next to that of his fair friend who had begun to seem to him not so much his protectress as the one to whom he might offer his protection.

The incidents of the day had already had their effect on Tancrède, and the beauty of the setting, the poetry of the evening, and above all the subtle perfume and the muffled rustling of silk that told of the nearness of the Countess, added to the intoxication he felt.

No, it was not chance that had given him this room. The Countess of Suttland no longer had confidence in the Goddess of Love, and had decided to take care of things herself.

CHAPTER XVI

THE SPELL THAT WAS BROKEN

Daisy had not failed to observe the high state of tension she had caused in the frank, innocent heart of her young friend, and was determined to make the most of it. To this end, while Tancrède, his mind somewhat in a haze, gazed out of the window, dreaming into the starry night, his more practical-minded friend had no thoughts of the starry firmament but was skilfully arranging in her own apartment a voluptuous spider's web. She dressed herself in a seductive negligée and studied the effect in the mirror. The result pleased her. A brisk fire gave out a delicious warmth and the air was heavy with the fragrance of her own fascinating perfume. Her belongings were strewn about in an elegant disorder to give an appearance of informality and intimacy.

Having thus arranged all details to her satisfaction, she sank into a high-back carved arm-chair and waited—listening. Soon a step could be heard on the tiles of the next room.

"At last," she thought, "he has made up his mind."

A low, almost hesitant rap sounded on the door between the two rooms.

"Come in, dear ghost!" she cried merrily.

Timorously, the Mysterious Cavalier ventured into the chamber. At the sight of Daisy's costume, he half withdrew, fearing his presence indiscreet. With an amused smile she commanded him to sit down on a stool at her feet. Omphale used this method with Hercules. Our Cavalier had not the giant strength of Alcmene's son, but he could match him in his weakness.

Daisy, gazing tenderly and affectionately at the boy at her feet, told him she had decided to make his fortune. Still—she couldn't very well do it until she knew more of his history. He was a soldier of fortune—so much he had told her; he had been brought up by mercenaries whom he accompanied on expeditions across Flanders and into the devastated parts of Germany. Ah, could it be true that no mother, no foster-mother even, had nursed him in his childhood? Did he know nothing of a woman's tenderness, of her sympathy?

The Mysterious Cavalier felt himself drawn by the music of this voice, the tenderness of the sentiments. His heart beat more rapidly at the nearness of her presence—maternal still; but was there the least bit of the enchantress also?

"No," he said softly, "for a long time I saw no women except those who flock about army camps or the shrieking, terrified women of a captured city."

"My poor boy! And yet, in spite of all this, you show no trace of anything but gentle breeding. The blood in your veins must be very noble indeed."

The Cavalier's shyness now disappeared. She had at last drawn him out. He touched upon things he had but hinted at before.

"Haven't I told you? I have had the great fortune to meet three noble women in my lifetime, three angels who revealed to me the divine heart of woman."

"Three!" repeated the young countess, with a shudder.

The Cavalier did not notice her emotion; he was busy with his own thoughts.

"Three angels! Yes. The nobility of womanhood I understood all in a flash through a woman whom I had scarcely seen . . . the Queen of France. Its white innocence, through a young girl . . . Claire de Cernay. Its gentle, protecting care I now know . . . through you, Madame."

He arose.

"I belong heart and soul to these three women who fill my grateful heart: the Queen has my devoted loyalty; you my eternal gratitude . . ."

"But you have forgotten one!"

She had made a slip. Tancrède was silent and offered no reply. The Countess realized her mistake and dropped the subject. She told him to sit down again.

"Come closer, Tancrède. Do not leave me. Listen, the wind is rising with the storm outside. It makes me shudder with fear. I don't like the wind moaning in the fireplace and roaring through the gorge. It is uncanny, evil. Do not desert me. Talk to me. Comfort me. I am, indeed, the mother you never knew. You must love me."

"As a son," she added quickly observing the expression of his face.

"Why—why, Madame," he stammered, "you are so young—and so beautiful!"

His shyness returned and again he looked away from her where she sat in such striking negligée. But the siren had more than one string to her bow and she knew how to use them all. She subtly simulated the words and gestures of maternal affection and the youth allowed himself to fall again into her web.

He was still somewhat embarrassed by the abandon of her attire, but he was convinced of her disinterested generosity. He opened the secrets of his heart to her and narrated all the important details of his history in full: the dying mercenary, the priest who heard the deathbed confession, the casket left by the dying man, the theft of the casket. Then came the swift succession of dramatic events —dangers risked and escaped, thanks to a strange protecting divinity which was an enigma to the youth himself.

Daisy listened to this long recital without a single interruption although she panted and shivered with emotion. She dug her nails into her palms in the effort to control herself and to regain mastery of a situation that threatened to overpower her.

She herself did not know whether the springs of her emotion lay in love or in a newly awakened hate. Did she have fear of his life or of his death? Under this stress her emotion had its feminine outlet, and from beneath her closed lids came crystal drops, one after another. She could not stop the flow. Beneath the thin negligée, that revealed her form, her bosom rose and fell with splendid and open freedom.

Was she merely playing a part? We cannot say. It is the supreme genius of an actress to enter into her character so wholly that she lives the actual life of a fictitious

person. Daisy was a supreme actress. At this moment she was balancing between fiction and reality; she had taken fire so quickly that she herself could not guess the strength of the flame. She was at one of those cross-roads where her entire life rested on the decision she must make. She hesitated between the madness of love in her blood and the death that her mind told her must be accomplished.

The Cavalier, of course, had no suspicion of the battle raging within her. He could not suspect her of duplicity. The agitation and grief of the woman to whom he felt he owed so much shook him deeply. He knelt at her feet, put his head on her knees, and looked at her tenderly. She smoothed his hair; a mother's hand would have shaken less. Her tears were too warm for pity perhaps. Her body, whose fragrance and delicate grace penetrated him, began to tremble. Stammering, seeking for words that would console, he succeeded only in sharing the uncertainty that emanated from her.

The wind increased in violence and roared through the castle; a gust caught the last candle burning in the room and extinguished it. The young Countess shrieked and fell forward in the Cavalier's arms.

"Save me from the dark—the storm!"

The tension was broken. The young man lifted her in his strong arms and carried her to her canopied bed where he left her after assuring the half-insane Countess that he would not leave the room. He lighted a candle and then sat down in the great arm-chair from which he had lifted her. He quietly prepared for his long night's vigil. The Countess, exhausted by her emotions and realizing that,

for the first time in her life, she had met a man who could not be seduced, fell into a fitful slumber.

It was dawn. The day promised to be fair. The Cavalier had fallen into a sound sleep. Daisy awoke and tiptoeing across the room bent over the Cavalier as he slumbered in the chair, his head half-sunk on his shoulder. A delightful picture, a pretty Psyche about to awaken young Cupid.

Was the Countess of Suttland devoured by the same curiosity that spelt tragedy for the young beauty of mythology? A ray of light came through the curtains and illumined the sleeper. Daisy's delicate hand, dexterously unfastened the youth's doublet, then unbuttoned his linen shirt. She leaned over the white form thus exposed, searching for something, just above the heart, a particular thing.

"*The Star*, he is marked with a Star—then it *is* he."

She had started, barefooted as she was, to leave the room and bring her brother, when a sigh from the Cavalier rooted her to the spot. Would he awaken? No, he had merely moved in his chair; there was a smile on his lips, he seemed to be dreaming. How young and handsome he was! Why was she hesitating? Had pity stabbed her? Pity? How absurd! Oh, why must it be he? *He* the enemy of all her hopes, the child she had thought dead and buried so long ago, whose presence spelt her ruin, her utter ruin?

Meanwhile, as the ideas raced in rapid succession through her mind, she reflected: He suspects nothing. He is in our power. Why be too hasty?

With noiseless step she returned to the chair.

"I still wish him to love me! He must be mine!"

Another sigh came from the Cavalier. A smile rested on his lips. No doubt he dreamed of love—would perhaps speak. A power stronger than herself impelled Daisy to lean over him; she would gather the honey of that smile with her own lips. From the half-open mouth surely a word was about to come. What would it be? Would it be of her—of his love for her?

Suddenly she grew deathly pale and sprang back; her face was twisted, her cheeks as flaming red as if she had been struck; her lips framed a terrible curse. Nothing in the future could now hold her back, for the Cavalier had breathed a name, the abhorred name of her unknown rival:

"Claire!"

This time indeed the enchantment was broken. With a look behind her of black hate the Countess of Suttland left the room where Tancrède slept, pursuing his happy dream of love. Even before she was out of the room, Claire's infuriated rival was repeating her brother's words of the evening before:

"He must die!"

CHAPTER XVII

THE CHASM OF DEATH

AFTER their unhappy night escapade, d'Artagnan and Aramis lost all hope of finding the Cavalier in London. They now decided to let the faithful Patrick conduct them to the castle of Kildar.

At first they thought of appealing to Lord Montague for additional men-at-arms to accompany them; but upon reflection they gave this up as useless and even dangerous.

"A large army is made for defeat," said the Abbé.

"Moreover," remarked the Musketeer, "three bold men may succeed where fifty would fail."

They also were sure in this way to leave no stragglers behind. The skirmish through which they had gone had now bound Patrick to them in blind loyalty; they were amused by the sudden loquacity that accompanied his reassured frame of mind.

Without awaiting the return of Bazin, who, we recall, had gone as a messenger to Claire de Cernay, they set out at once, three avengers bound for the north. They ate at farm-houses and lightened thier journey by listening to Patrick who was now as communicative as he had before been taciturn. But d'Artagnan was no longer the

carefree companion of other days. He brooded over the deep wrong done him by de Bergerac—the most terrible insult that he had ever been forced to endure.

"He treated me as a spy, after I had spared him, saved him! And at this public affront, *I*, d'Artagnan, had to withdraw! Ah, the Queen will never know what that silence cost me. For *me* to remain silent, when my blood boiled to avenge an insult by a counter insult so great as to force him to fight—with a chance to slay him on the spot!"

Aramis divined the melancholy that came from his friend's wounded honor, but he carefully avoided the appearance of sympathy. He seemed not to notice the sadness or it causes. When someone on foot or in a carriage passed, he would enquire casually:

"Have you seen recently a gentleman with a great aquiline nose?"

The reply was always negative.

"Well, have you seen a great, fat giant of a man with a smiling face and beside him a weazened little fellow with a red nose?"

"No, neither of them."

These replies are not to be wondered at. Travellers could hardly have met the men described when these men were actually behind our three avengers. Cyrano, Saint-Amant, and Linières were the rear-guard of the MacLegor band, and did not leave London until those who planned to pursue them had themselves set out.

The two Frenchmen, guided by the Irishman, reached the foot of the Highlands after a successful trip in which there were no incidents worth recording. The mountains facing them rose abruptly. Patrick led the way up steep

paths which grew narrower with the ascent until they were mere winding threads on the mountain's side. It was upon one of these trails that they met by chance Duretête, mounted on a plough-horse.

"Monsieur the jailer, just what are you doing here?"

"You know well," replied the brave fellow. "I am on the same scent and the same business that you are. Let me pass."

"Yes, but a moment. Are you seeking the Cavalier?"

"Never!" sneered Duretête. "*He* will be made to pay and without my aid—no, the man I'm dogging is my tempter, the Limb of Satan, the Prince of Evil—he who caused my fall and twice stole my prisoners from me. I shall follow his steps until I destroy him!"

"So this comedy is turning into tragedy," thought the Musketeer. "The blind hatred of a feeble mind against the man who led him into temptation and then tricked him."

The jailer continued on his way, his eyes having the glassy stare of one driven by an hallucination.

"He shall die and by my hand. I have sworn it. He shall die a brutal death from which his devil's power can not save him!"

"*Mordi!*" d'Artagnan shivered. "Monsieur de Bergerac does not deserve such a fate."

Then suddenly he called back:

"*Sandis!* Duretête, you then know where Monsieur de Bergerac is?"

"*Parbleu*, yes, I have followed him from London!"

"So have we, but we haven't found him."

"You are here before him. But he has approached

nearer during the night; they are travelling rapidly. The main body of the Puritans has taken the mountain pass we are on now—if it weren't for the rocks you could see the signs of their passage."

Duretête then kicked the sides of his mount and dashed away.

A sudden devilish joy, a joy based on hate, filled d'Artagnan's breast; forgetting everything, his mission, the dangers on every side, both to him and to the Cavalier, he uttered a deep groan of relief. Now at last he could endure the shame of his insulted honor. Soon it would be purified in Cyrano's blood—or his own. Aramis and Patrick, sensing the depth of this passion, vainly urged prudence.

Prudence! Ah, what did prudence mean now? He knew, he could understand only one thing: Cyrano, the man who had treated him as a spy, was near! Earth was too small to hold them both.

Patrick diplomatically prepared to take another trail, longer, he said, but perhaps safer. Aramis checked him with a gesture. Such a plan would only pour oil on the flames. He knew his friend too well to think of temporizing; once his decision was taken, he could never be turned aside.

D'Artagnan explained his plans:

"My friends, we separate here. In a moment of supreme renunciation I placed duty before honor. But the suffering this causes has become intolerable. It must be healed. Stained by one damning word, I am perhaps unworthy of reaching the promised land . . . ! You pity me, but yet you understand. You two must carry on the just cause in which I should like to help; but another

and more imperious duty calls me—my honor must be restored.

"Oh, my friends, my friends," he continued passionately, "the time for laughter is gone, and gone the friendly combat with an honorable adversary. Henceforth it is a contest, body to body, without quarter, and with one witness only, and He an impartial one—God shall judge between us."

Then, waving farewell to his two saddened companions, he turned his horse into the precipitous path and started down at a full gallop, at the risk of his neck. Heaven alone knew if he would ever return to his friends.

"DEVIL take this path!" said Saint-Amant, mopping his brow.

"Yes, it's the path of the damned!" agreed Linières. "If we ever get out of this, I'll offer a big something or other to my patron saint."

"It will be a libation of wine, Monsieur the devotee of Bacchus," laughed Cyrano. "Pluck up your spirits, we'll soon reach the end."

"That's all very well for you, Savinien; the sharp stones don't hurt your toughened hide! And how much resistance do you offer to the wind anyway? But look at me—the wind takes my poor paunch for a ball to bat about!"

"Speak up, Linières, where are our enemies?"

"I left them resting last night all very cozy with supper ready, while we, as though driven by the devil, make forced marches by night."

"Shouldn't we overtake them and then get ahead of them in these defiles?"

"Where we could break our necks for the pleasure of MacLegor?"

"Yet, we must not abandon our Mysterious Cavalier to Lord Montague and to the Cardinal and his party."

"Bah! Lord Montague seems to me to care as much for us as he does for the Pope's breeks. He doesn't even pursue us . . . since we have on our tracks only a trio of horsemen and one of them an old man."

"Who is the old chap?"

"Some guide, probably."

Saint-Amant mopped his head for the hundredth time, and observed pointedly:

"After all, this Monsieur d'Artagnan has a good deal of courage to go out almost single-handed against a troop of armed men."

"*Vivadious*, all that means is that having failed to take us by force, he gave up that trick. But what new scheme is he plotting?"

"Savinien, my boy, I am afraid you are hardly fair to this man."

"You keep insisting that he is generous, and yet he behaved like an officer of the police."

"Not at all! I saw him spare us on the Abbéville road."

"A trick, you blind mule. He spared us for one purpose; thanks to us, he hoped to track down the Cavalier."

"Surely, Savinien, if love can be blind, hatred can be also . . . your eyes are crossed when it comes to seeing d'Artagnan."

"And as for you, the world is black as soon as MacLegor is mentioned."

"And here is the reason: the soft eyes of the sister do not illumine the world for *me*."

Cyrano, annoyed, bit his lip at this thrust.

"You big gourmand, you can't see further than the end of your nose."

"If you could see as far as the tip of yours you would do well."

This last remark was made in Saint-Amant's mind, for he knew it was too dangerous a thing to say aloud.

The sun had now set behind the peaks. Night was falling. The sky was clear, sparkling with stars. Moonlight flooded the earth. After their banter, they fell into silence. They climbed the narrow path in Indian file. There was constant danger both from the loose stones that caused the horses to stumble and from the dark shadows that alternated with the patches of bright moonlight.

The path hugged the shoulder of the mountain. On one side the sharp precipice loomed constantly, the dislodged stones would roll down into the abyss and the faint sound of impact indicated the profound depth they reached. They had slowed up to take a turn where the loose stones made extreme caution necessary, when Cyrano suddenly called:

"Halt!"

A gust of wind seemed to bring a familiar sound to his ears. Yet, surely, it was impossible that on the edge of these dangerous cliffs, he could hear the galloping of a horse.

"What mad man would dare risk it?" he reflected.

But he was not mistaken. The eyes of the three travellers turned toward the direction of the sound and soon

on the perilous flank of the mountain they beheld the horseman. The moonlight silhouetted him sharply; at the risk of life and limb, he was urging on his mount and even driving spurs into his flank. Cyrano directed his companions to pass over the dangerous turn, while he remained rooted to the spot, his feet within a few inches of the perilous precipice.

Suddenly a cry came from his lips.

"D'Artagnan!"

The man he had insulted was coming! Hardly realizing it himself, he had been waiting for his enemy to appear. At last!

There was a brief dialogue between the two adversaries; a short distance away Saint-Amant and Linières looked helplessly on, unwilling witnesses of a mortal combat that must be fought on a narrow path where two could not stand abreast.

"Yes," shouted the Musketeer, replying to Cyrano's exclamation, "d'Artagnan has come to ask you, Monsieur de Bergerac, if you still take him for a policeman and a spy?"

"This has been decreed by Fate," said Cyrano speaking half to himself. "Better late than never, and here is the place, for we are following the same path."

"*Cadédis*, and a path which has a foothold for *one* only! A path on which one will give way to the other. And this time you cannot refuse to draw the sword against me. . . ."

"And if I do refuse?"

"Then I shall pass, just the same."

"To join the Cavalier Tancrède, whom you seek?"

"Thank you, you always know everything," sneered the Musketeer.

"The die is cast. We must fight it out."

Both horsemen dismounted quickly and sought on the rocky side of the mountain some projection to which to attach the bridles of their horses. They found nothing; the wall was as smooth as it was steep, and on the path the wind and heavy rains had swept all growth away so that not even the heather clung there. Saint-Amant and Linières were too far away to offer aid to either antagonist.

Finally, abandoning the impossible, the Musketeer called impatiently:

"We can still manage, Monsieur de Bergerac!"

He passed the bridle of his horse over his left arm, steadied his feet as well as he could, and drew his sword. The next moment Cyrano had done likewise and the duel began.

An epic fight, a thrilling and terrible contest, which took place on a path no wider than the breadth of a man's shoulders and on one side bordered by a precipice into which the first false step would plunge the unlucky one to his death.

The struggle was also extraordinary because of its limitations: the two principals were prevented from retreating by the bulk of their horses and neither could take a step to one side to avoid his enemy's blade, for the chasm opened to swallow up the first who moved.

It was a pitiless combat in which no quarter was asked or given. A wild and bitter fight which made the historic conflicts of Amadis of Gaul or of Ariosto seem like child's play.

Nearby were the two agonized witnesses, powerless to stop the duel, a duel which imperilled the life of a third

person—Tancrède. The swords rang. Not a word was spoken. The echoes of the mountain carried away and magnified the clashing of steel. There were attacks, feints, touches. The echoes at moments seemed mirthful and then again mournful.

Is our sympathy to be with Cyrano, blindly sacrificing himself for his friend—and oh, irony!—whose success will bring disaster to the very friend in whose defence he is fighting? Or is it to be with d'Artagnan, so brave and generous, who, stinging under a mortal insult, is seeking justice?

We ourselves shudder while relating the details of the combat which through a fatal misunderstanding imperils two noble hearts. Either result will be lamentable, for the victor when once he learns the truth, will shed endless tears over his dead antagonist.

Blood began to flow from surface wounds. The two swordsmen were the greatest of their day and neither spared the other. They fought with feet fixed on the ground and no blow could be side-stepped. Death faced them on every hand. They knew that a moment's wavering was suicide.

Aramis and Patrick O'Brien had had no intention of abandoning their friend as he suggested: they had followed his headlong descent from a distance keeping him in sight as well as they might. They too arrived at the rocky ledge. When they saw the combat that was taking place they drew in their horses and, breathless, gazed at the titanic struggle that the moon, appearing from behind a cloud, now lighted up.

The spectators watched in dead silence, a silence broken

only by the scrape of steel on steel, or the clash of a guard when struck. When would fate decide between these two swordsmen, each so brave and noble, each so convinced of the righteousness of his cause?

The silence was hardest for Cyrano to endure; he was the first to break it. He aimed at the head of his adversary, crying:

"This for Monsieur le Cardinal!"

"His Eminence is not at home!" gibed the Musketeer, parrying the thrust skillfully; then, as he himself attacked, he exclaimed:

"And this is for God!"

Light gravel had been falling for some moments from the cliff above and there was a constant low, rumbling noise—the kind of noise that is sometimes forerunner of a landslide. Had God only awaited the invocation of His name before deciding between the combatants?

Suddenly a hideous cracking sound was heard, followed by a boom not unlike distant thunder. Four voices raised in terror pierced through the roar of the falling mass from the mountain.

Before Cyrano's eyes there plunged downward a huge mass of débris, accompanied by a strong wind that blew clouds of dust with it.

The horses cowered back terrified, their nostrils smoking, legs quivering, wild with fright, frantic to escape this terrible danger.

Completely stunned, Cyrano stared about him. He looked at his hand—only the hilt of a broken sword was left. He glanced along the ledge to discover his adversary.

Then, at last, the truth dawned upon him. He uttered an oath of horror.

D'Artagnan and his horse had disappeared! Both had been swept away by the avalanche.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE GHOST OF BUCKINGHAM

About the time that these incidents in the mountains occurred, a few hours journey from the chasm of death, a brilliant cortège of horsemen accompanying a litter, defiled from a pass in the Grampians.

These mountains form the backbone of Scotland. They rise in the southwest near Lake Etive, in the county of Argyle, and their rugged granite masses follow to the northeast and nearly reach the mouth of the Dee. They separate the Scotch lowlands from the highlands.

In the shadow of the peak of Cairngorn, in the county of Angus, rose the vast battlements of Kildar Castle. The travellers were met by a piper and by a large group made up of Highland lairds, farmers, and peasants. The piper with his bag-pipe was already playing joyous airs, while the crowd gave a hearty welcome to the newcomers.

Headed by the ever haughty MacLegor, the group of horsemen filed into the great court of the castle. Harry presented his young companion to the chiefs of the clan; his manner was courteous but his words brief:

"The Cavalier Tancrède, my very prized assistant."

The Countess of Suttland also made her entry and was

greeted with rude gallantry by all the young nobles attached to the clan of Angus MacDiarmid.

The Cavalier was left to himself and gazed with awe at the imposing spectacle. Everything was new to him. He noticed to his surprise that the apparent familiarity of the lords was strictly confined to their own class. He was amused by their gallantry toward the Countess, whom, since the famous night spent in her apartment, he had rather carefully avoided. Why, it would be hard to tell, but he at last realized that his "little mother" loved him with something more than maternal affection. He was not afraid—only cautious.

When the greetings in the court were over, Tancrède went into the great Gothic hall where the old Laird of Kildar was to receive them.

The Cavalier had asked about the Laird during the journey. He had been told that the old man lived a solitary life. He kept to his room, silent and melancholy. His door was always locked, he admitted only his chaplain—an aged man whose mind seemed as weak as his own—and his dog, an extremely old collie.

MacLegor had insisted that the Laird be informed of the arrival of his children. The Laird came into the hall, a strange, lonely figure, racked with grief and sorrow. His step was faltering but he straightened himself to receive the salute of his heir and, with grave tenderness, the perfunctory kiss of his daughter.

Suddenly the Laird seemed to have received a shock. He tried to step back but could not. He stood transfixed, his eyes staring, his lips moving nervously. What caused this strong emotion? Surely not our Cavalier, who was

bowing respectfully before him! The old nobleman did not return the salute. At last when he was able to move his atrophied limbs he started to withdraw, pushing from his sight with outstretched hands the disturbing vision of an endless nightmare.

Harry turned pale, went straight to his father, took his quivering arm and led him quickly from the hall and away from the awakening curiosity.

Once alone with him he asked:

"What's the matter, father? What are you disturbed about?"

Angus answered with these mysterious words:

"He, he has come back. . . . My dreams said he would come back."

"Madness! You are giving way to hallucinations."

Angus shook his white head obstinately.

"It is *he*. I recognized him at once; I—it is—"

He spoke a name; MacLegor smothered it on the lips which he covered with his hand. It was a name never to be mentioned in that house. Harry cast a stealthy glance about to see that no one had heard. He then called the Laird's servants and confided to them their stupefied master; after which he returned to the hall, where a banquet was being prepared. His sister awaited him. In a low voice, she asked:

"Well, we are not mistaken?"

"No, he recognized him."

The Countess was prepared for this and yet it startled her.

In the meantime Tancrède, the innocent cause of this scene, had noticed nothing out of the way. The costume of

the men amused him, as did the strangeness of the customs that seemed half pastoral eclogue, half *Roman de gestes*. He watched with the keenest interest all the preparations for the banquet.

Meats and especially drinks were lavishly spread out on the table. Huge candelabra had been placed at either end, in which were set torches steeped in resin, whose ruddy glow reached to the arches and threw into relief the carvings of the supporting columns. The banquet itself was lively, even noisy, lasting well into the night. The jovial guests ate and drank with the abandon of those who do not have to think of their digestions. The bagpipes played and everyone joined in singing the old ballads telling of love or war.

The success of the enterprise was drunk in many toasts. Finally Harry MacLegor and the Countess Daisy withdrew. This was to indicate that strict formality was at an end, and that the banquet could now become whatever the guests desired to make it.

The Cavalier remained at the feast, refusing to drink any further toasts, but following with the liveliest interest the scene that became more varied as time sped. He heard old stories and legends. He was amazed that the guests were able to continue seated at table after their generous potions. Faces burned ruddier—but it may have been the ruddy torches.

"*Mazette*, this would be the company for our friend Linières," he reflected, "to say nothing of Saint-Amant—too bad they are delayed! What can have happened to them in the Grampians?"

No presentiment crossed the Cavalier's mind to tell him that in a nearby room enemies were plotting his death. His fate was being decided and he remained unsuspecting. The brother and sister were now closeted together. Each was feeling for the hidden thought of the other.

"We must come to a conclusion," said MacLegor after a silence.

"It is high time," agreed Daisy. "We have delayed too long already."

"No, we couldn't have killed him on the way here. To have acted too soon would have been rash. There would have been eye-witnesses."

"We might have got rid of them."

"A difficult procedure. And *afterward*, how should we have explained his 'absence' to our people or to his friends?"

"His friends! Bah, we don't have to consider that crowd."

"My dear sister, if it weren't for this dull-witted de Bergerac, the Cavalier would be in the hands of Montague and our game would be up!"

Silence fell again. The very thought of a meeting between Montague and Tancrède caused a shiver of fear to run through both of them.

They had been successful through a dastardly and successful plot evolved by Vauselle. Their position was high, but they knew it rested on an uncertain foundation. Today they were rich, powerful, respected (or at least feared), popular (or outwardly so); tomorrow they might be denounced and pursued as thieves and assassins. Already

that would have been their fate had not a happy chance and the quick complicity of Vauselle placed their enemy in their hands. For this Daisy quite justly took no little credit to herself.

The brother and sister were well aware that the cloud which had settled on the old Laird's mind threatened to envelop them too, for they were the real assassins of the King's favorite. They had directed Felton's blow and the blood of Buckingham cried for vengeance. This time they had no choice; they could not procrastinate, hesitate, or turn back. Twice this boy had slipped through their fingers; their accomplices had failed them or had been bought off.

"No more accomplices!" growled MacLegor, making a gesture as of an executioner's axe falling on a head. "We must act alone!"

"At last light dawns on you," Daisy agreed triumphantly. "Had you but realized this sooner, we should have been spared much trouble. Act for yourself—always! The hireling's arm is uncertain and you pay high for that uncertainty."

"I paid well, but I'll take no chances on losing this time!"

"Good! Keep to that decision. What is *he* doing now?"

Harry pressed his sister's hand and with smirking gaiety whispered in her ear:

"He? I'll tell you. The sot is intoxicating himself with drink and song. Nothing warns him of the blow that is aimed at him. Well, at least he is well entertained as his last moments draw near."

"No one will warn him this time! Tell me, his friends —how about them?"

"There's not the least danger from that quarter. A fictitious message purporting to come from Cromwell has forced them to return to London with all speed."

"A wise precaution! And Montague's men?"

"I'll have to explain the whole plan, Daisy. As de Bergerac and his companions turn back they will have to meet Montague's men on the narrow mountain path where it crosses—you know the spot—on the side of Cairngorn."

"Then they must be battling at this very moment? Splendid, Harry! Fate is with us!"

"Yes, 'those whom the gods pursue, they render blind.'"

They both laughed, such a laugh as the Devil must give when he has ensnared his prey. Their vulture claws held the little bird who had innocently visited their mountain eyrie; beak and claw would soon tear him limb from limb; no human power could save him from their clutches.

"God, Himself," cried MacLegor, exulting at his coming victory, "God, Himself cannot stop us now."

"Never!" agreed Daisy firmly. "His power stops where ours begins!"

She had hardly finished these words when there came from behind her an exclamation:

"Blasphemy!"

Brother and sister turned, ready to seize the intruder.

"Father!" they gasped.

Angus MacDiarmid, the instrument of the first crime, walked slowly toward them, a terrible, threatening figure, ravaged by remorse. He had come in like a ghost through a secret door unknown even to his children. His voice was

broken with anguish, but he spoke like one of the prophets of old:

"My children, do not tempt God! Do not draw down upon you the wrath of Him who is alone the Judge of the living and the dead."

The appeal exasperated MacLegor.

"Was His almighty power able to check the blow you aimed at the heart of Buckingham? Hardly!"

"God sees everything. God knows everything. He is everywhere."

"That may be so, but, I repeat, He did not turn aside the dagger of Felton from the breast of my lord, the Duke. He did not save the father, nor will He the son!"

"Blind, mad, and unhappy children!" cried the old man, as his voice gathered strength. "If He did not save the father, He set the mark of blood on the brow of the murderers. This mark burns, eats its way, kills!"

"Hallucinations! Visions! Ghosts!"

"MacLegor, I speak the truth, the cruel truth! John Felton paid the penalty of his crime at Portsmouth and God in His mercy may have pardoned the condemned man. But I, Angus MacDiarmid, who planned the crime and am most culpable, have never expiated the deed and have never been forgiven."

"Let your Supreme Ruler reach down and perform a miracle if He wishes to save him."

"Blasphemy, again! If you have no pity on me, MacLegor, at least, I implore you, have pity on yourself."

Pity was not understood by this brother and sister. They shook their heads. The old Laird trembled, his knees shook, but he appealed again:

"It was for you that I committed that crime, for you that innocent blood was shed. The gold was near, almost in my hands. I was tempted. I wished it to be yours. I took it and I gave it to you. I could keep none of it—it was for you. But to me belong the crime and what followed—remorse, sleepless nights of a haunted being, eternal damnation, perhaps. This has been my fate; just this! And now, alas—"

"It is our ruin, if he lives."

"MacLegor, if he dies, it is worse ruin! You will, my son, experience all the torments I have endured. You will curse your father—you will even cry out against the mother who brought you into a world where one suffers the nameless tortures that I have borne for you, you two, my own children. . . . Ah, God, hell is an easier choice!"

Harry's only response was an incredulous, mocking laugh.

The father's head fell forward; he was the picture of desolation. He lifted his head and turned toward the Countess of Suttland who had acted as though this appeal did not concern her:

"You, my little girl, so pure, so beautiful with your angel-face—you will spare this boy, will you not? Plead his case with your brother, plead mine, plead for us all!"

The girl drew her brows together, and said slowly:

"He must die!"

The old man shrank from her in horror. Whose was this Medusa face? Not his daughter's, not his angel's! Was it then true—she could assume the aspect of a fallen angel? He turned his eyes from her, but continued:

"After all, he does not menace you, this boy. You are

safe, rich in your dead husband's fortune, independent. You have nothing to gain by this death—Oh my child, my darling, be merciful, spare him!"

"He must die!"

Stunned, the old man could only wring his withered hands.

"You hate him, then. And why?"

The Countess's lips did not pronounce the name of Claire de Cernay, that name that had been breathed into her ear like an insult. The festering wound had turned her into a vindictive, relentless creature. For the third time her lips, that seemed so lovely, so pure, let fall the words that she hoped would pierce the heart of her happy rival:

"He must die!"

The Laird dragged himself toward his son, twisting his hands as he went. He steadied himself by the back of a chair, and made a movement as though to kneel.

"Harry," he implored, "shed no blood. For having once shed blood, I have suffered tortures. Have mercy, my son. Do not send another ghost of a murdered man to haunt these blood-stained walls."

The younger man was silent. After some moments' reflection, he said.

"Very well! To please you, father, *your walls shall not be stained by the shedding of his blood nor will the laws of hospitality be violated under your roof!*"

The old Laird was reassured, but his efforts had so exhausted him that he sank back into the apathy from which the agony of remorse had for a short time drawn him. He was like a child, when his son led him back to his room

and placed him in his own arm-chair; his collie lay waiting by the chair; the chaplain, his only human companion, also waited. This chaplain had one pleasure, that of stabbing rats aroused by the collie; when he caught one he would exclaim:

"Strike, George!"

Like that of his master, the mental weakness of the Presbyterian clergyman dated from the time of Buckingham's death; his madness took the form of endlessly imitating the gesture of Lieutenant Felton when he had stabbed Buckingham.

Thus was inexorably re-enacted an old murder, the memory of which agonized the Laird Angus. In spite of himself, he was forced to see this scene continually re-enacted in his own room, before his own eyes.

CHAPTER XIX

D'ARTAGNAN AGAINST CYRANO

HARRY had no sooner entered the room where his sister awaited him than she greeted him sarcastically:

"Didn't I say you would spare him?"

MacLegor's gesture imposed silence. He carefully double-locked the door and barricaded the false door through which his father had surprised them; then going close to Daisy, he whispered:

"What makes you think I'll spare him?"

"Am I dreaming? Didn't I hear you say: 'His blood shall not flow?' "

"And that deceived you? Are deaths always bloody?"

" 'Under this roof the life of the guest shall be safe.' "

"Can't he be lured away?"

The Countess of Suttland uttered a cry of joy:

"I understand you! We understand each other. You are truly a MacLegor!"

"When tomorrow dawns he will no longer be in our path. I swear it. But, there will be no blood-shed; no second spectre will haunt this castle. But rest assured; from this moment his death is a certainty; even the place has been chosen."

"Where?—tell me."

Harry led his sister to the window and pointed to something that could be dimly seen through the glass—the dark ruin of an old feudal tower which revealed its colossal and sinister bulk in the moonlight.

"There! In the donjon of the *Cursed Castle.*"

THE avalanche of rock and earth tore its way down the mountain, plunging to the depths below. Cyrano stood looking with strained eyes into the gulf down which his adversary had disappeared.

The four witnesses of this epic combat, brought at its climax so suddenly and strangely to an end, also stood for a moment speechless, horrified by the tragedy. Then they made their way toward the path of the boulder, Aramis and Patrick quickly from their side, Saint-Amant and Linières more slowly because of the obstructions.

At last they met. Looking up, instinctively, to the place whence the avalanche had come, there, at a great height above them, they saw a misshapen creature who was recklessly leaning over the cliff in order to peer into the chasm below. A ray of moonlight played on the face of this strange being and four voices exclaimed:

"Duretête!"

And it was he, indeed. With his brute tenacity and fixed idea of vengeance, the jailer of the Bastille came to to restore his own peace of mind by destroying his enemy, the demon who had tormented him and who was the instrument of his fall. From the crest of the mountain, he had been for a quarter of an hour following the progress of Cyrano's party, until he came to a point where a great

boulder balanced unsteadily on the edge of the mountain.

He had observed the conflict of the Gascons on the path below and assured himself that the boulder once precipitated would crush the combatants. One of them he was sure was Cyrano—Beelzebub, the Evil Spirit who should be sent back to his infernal dwelling place.

Quickly he set to work and, using nothing but his own hands, succeeded in pushing the boulder over the edge. He laughed brutally as he saw the mass of Grampian rock plunge into the dark chasm, and drop down the steep granite wall, carrying with it on its way, even the ledge of the path and, necessarily, the expiatory victim who stood there. From such a height, he could not recognize d'Artagnan, but was sure that the body which fell in the cloud of dust and shower of stones was that of Bergerac.

"*Consummatum est!* as the cursed preacher of Picardy said." With these words he walked away content, and disappeared among the rocks. Aramis climbed to the edge of the chasm. It was better to aid the victim than to pursue the murderer. He leaned over the abyss and called aloud:

"D'Artagnan, my friend, my best friend, friend of my youth!—have you escaped a thousand times from great peril, backed by your courage and by your sword, only to perish here by the hand of a miserable assassin? My friend, my brother, I will avenge you, I swear it. May God, who hears me and judges me, aid me in this!"

Cyrano's companions suddenly looked at each other as they heard the accents of this voice; they listened with fixed attention and showed increased signs of amazement.

"Where have we heard that voice?"

The face of the Musketeer's friend was in shadow. He took off his hat, and knelt down, as before a tomb, for prayer. Then the three habitués of the Cabaret des Poètes —alas! how far away—looked at each other questioningly. Three answers came simultaneously:

"The preacher of the cellar!"

"The commentator on Saint Paul!"

"The donor of the key of salvation!"

Cyrano remained dumb before this figure in prayer. His face was convulsed by the bitterness of a thought that overwhelmed him.

When Aramis stood up, his eyes were misty.

The Gascon uncovered and questioned hesitatingly:

"We have met before, have we not, Monsieur?"

"Yes, in London. We were on opposite sides."

The priest spoke coldly and was about to turn his back. The Gascon went on:

"Please forgive me. I wish to say something else. My friends and I endured a hard siege, became prisoners; we remained in serious peril, until an unknown hand providentially drew us from the net."

" 'Providential' is the word," said the two others.

"We have long wondered who could have sent us this unknown deliverer."

"We have long wondered," repeated Linières' echo.

"At present I am forced to believe that that saving hand, Monsieur, was yours and that he who planned the aid was—"

Cyrano choked and could not speak; he made an attempt but could only point to the precipice.

"It was—it was he?"

"Monsieur, the secret was my friend's. He has taken it with him."

Cyrano's remorse was so great that he was forced to speak.

"Oh, I see, I begin to see. And I was dull enough, unjust enough, vile enough, to insult this noble heart, calumniate it. I am the cause of his death. Ah, it's too cruel, I can do nothing for him, he is dead! He can never know my grief! Grant me pardon."

"Ask that forgiveness of Him who alone can now grant it."

Aramis turned to mount his horse. The poet again stopped him:

"Have mercy, and do not leave me thus, I beg of you. You were his friend, do not leave me without a word, with such a load on my conscience."

The Abbé was moved. In spite of himself he felt the depth and sincerity of this contrition, but what could he do?

"Time is pressing," he said. "We can do no more for my lost friend but weep for him and avenge him. But before that task, there is work that brooks no delay."

"Work?"

"His work," said the Abbé sadly with an eloquent gesture.

"Monsieur, whatever the work, I offer my aid. Accept it. It will be the beginning of my expiation. What is this work?"

"He alone could have explained it."

"Have pity on me. Ah, I know it now! I was deceived. Whenever he crossed my path I thought him an

enemy; I found him everywhere that the Cavalier went. And then again here! . . . I must be frank—I thought you were our adversaries. It was foolish, I know that now; three men alone, what harm could they do?

"I know that you are thinking now not of your loss, but of the Cavalier's safety. It agonizes me to know that the bitter misunderstanding exists yet, and that I can not join you to help our Cavalier. Ah! d'Artagnan warned me, 'You will shed tears of blood.' And you see, Monsieur, I already weep. I weep for him I supposed my enemy. God knows that I would joyfully throw myself into this chasm if it would bring life back to d'Artagnan; he is a hundred times more worthy to live than I!"

No one could hear this sincere confession without being touched. Aramis did not speak but made a gesture of regret. Patrick came quickly forward and pushing past Aramis took up the conversation:

"God has said 'Peace to men of good will.' If you are sincere and loyal, here is the moment to prove it. You ask, gentlemen, why we are following the Cavalier. I will tell you. We are seeking to save the son of my old master, the Duke of Buckingham, from the hands of those who assassinated his father, and stole his fortune—"

Amazement fell on the group.

"The son of Buckingham!"

Cyrano moved forward impetuously:

"*Mordious!* Come! We are with you!"

The two groups were about to set out and to leave the scene of such bravery and tragedy, when Cyrano, who seemed not able to tear himself from the precipice, came toward Aramis and said:

"No, it is not possible. Monsieur d'Artagnan would not refuse to answer me when I implore his pardon."

Then as the four looked on, a strange scene was enacted. Cyrano leaned sharply over the chasm and with the clarion voice we know so well shouted three times into the abyss.

"D'Artagnan! D'Artagnan! D'Artagnan!"

The echoes of the gorge caught the tones and resounded to the name. Aramis thought the Gascon mad and tried to draw him back, but Cyrano remained, his hand to his ear listening intently.

"If Monsieur d'Artagnan does not reply," he said, now almost beside himself, "it is because he will not forgive me. In that case, *Sandious!* I will ask his reason why—and we will have it out—there where he is."

At that moment from the bottom of the precipice a faint moan was heard, more like the moaning of the wind than the plaint of a human being. Cyrano sprang into an erect position:

"Monsieur d'Artagnan lives, and I shall be forgiven!"

He was not deceived. It was the low moan of an injured creature, and the sound came from the man he believed he had killed, the man who had conquered him not by arms but by generosity, and whom he must now save at all costs, in order to make him his friend. Cyrano was already unbuckling his belt and taking off his pourpoint; the others tossing the bridles of their horses to Patrick ran to aid Cyrano.

Without a word, but swiftly, they rolled up their mantles and tied them end to end; to lengthen this improvised rope, all possible straps and belts were added. Cryano swung off into the abyss sustained by the combined efforts

of the powerful Saint-Amant and the sinewy chaplain.

"Let out the rope."

The descent was successful; the bold Cyrano risked breaking his bones if the improvised rope did not hold, but he eased his weight by resting his feet on jutting rocks and by seizing branches or herbage, and gripping his fingers into fissures; descending gradually, he disappeared into the darkness that closed around him.

"Be careful now," said Linières. "It's a question of enough rope!"

Fear agonized those who paid it out, for only a few feet of it still remained. At that moment a cry came from the abyss.

"Stop!"

"At last! What a relief!"

Aramis and Saint-Amant held fast, but both of them were sweating and breathing hard. Linières was lying flat on his stomach by the edge of the ravine, trying to pierce the obscurity with his eyes; it seemed to him that he could detect a slight, uncertain movement.

"Up a bit—gently, now!"

Muscles became taut again and the small Linières joined the others to add his weakness to their strength; slowly the rope was pulled up. Hope gave them two-fold strength. In the midst of the abyss were two men, clinging together, one nearly exhausted after a superhuman effort, the other bleeding and limp; two adversaries, two enemies now entwined.

How had the Musketeer escaped death? The explanation is simple. When the great boulder fell, it had grazed d'Artagnan without touching him, but it had struck the

horse, whose bridle he held, full in the flank; it tore loose part of the path and flung into the void at the same moment the crushed animal and the uninjured man. The breaking of the bridle freed the Musketeer from the dead animal.

At this point the side of the mountains descended in a line not far from vertical, but on certain jutting ledges enough earth had been left to give root to vegetation; dwarf pine, thorn bushes, creepers, and lichens grew there. On such a wooded ledge the inert body of the Musketeer had fallen; his garments were in tatters and his body cut by the sharp branches.

When Cyrano found him, his body was bent almost double, and hung half over the precipice, but one leg had caught in a vine, and the middle of the body was held by the stiff branches of a pine.

With infinite care the bruised body was carried to the cottage of the nearest Highlander. The people, by good luck, proved to be hospitable and kindly. The husband had been a soldier and knew how to care for wounds. He was glad to nurse the injured man and refused money with proud indignation when it was offered to him.

Once in bed and properly cared for, d'Artagnan revived and learned all that had happened. Through his half-opened eyes he saw the anxious face of his enemy bending over him. A smile hovered on the pale lips.

"I said so," he murmured. "The one most injured is you, Monsieur de Bergèrac."

Cyrano fell on his knees.

"Monsieur d'Artagnan, how can I ever atone for my infamy?"

He could think of nothing to offer in reparation but, "*Cadédis*, we'll fight it out when you are well!"

The smile of the Musketeer grew broader: that familiar oath brought him back to his own Gascony, the beloved country of his passionate youth.

"No," he said, "no more battles between us!"

With mock seriousness Aramis suggested:

"When you stop to think of it, Monsieur de Bergerac, you cannot do it, because you have saved his life."

"Go for him now, Savinien!" urged Saint-Amant, pushing the Gascon toward the couch from which his adversary was gently regarding him.

And when the two paladins came to grips in a long embrace, reconciled forever, there was no avalanche—Cyrano stood up, radiant:

"*Mordious!*" he swore. "Now, united, we are unconquerable. What can MacLegor and his sister—what can the Cardinal and all his counsellors—what can all Europe or the whole world, do against these two swords united, with d'Artagnan joined to Cyrano?"

The Musketeer was cheered. "On my word, I am indeed conquered! This Gascon is more Gascon than I, *Sandis!* All now is well here and I am in no danger, but as for him!—Go to his aid quickly." His finger pointed the way, his eye flashed. He lay down and closed his eyes, resolved to hear no more.

To the others this resignation was a command. They set out at once, leaving their wounded companion in the care of the mountaineer. The next moment, with Patrick leading them, Saint-Amant, Linières, Aramis, and Cyrano turned in the direction of Kildar Castle.

CHAPTER XX

THE VIPER'S NEST

HARRY MACLEGOR had sworn to the old Laird that the guest under his roof should be safe. The Presbyterian who could sink to crime was yet a man of his word. Do not be deceived when we say this, and think that, like the two Gascons, MacLegor will be reconciled with his enemy.

In the first place there could hardly be a reconciliation, for the Cavalier did not suspect the plot of his protector and did not dream that he had any reason to fear him—quite the contrary. And then, MacLegor had a code of his own, and practised casuistry in his own way and time. Not a hair of Tancrède's head should be touched as long as he was within the walls of Kildar. So much had been settled and agreed upon. Alive and free the Cavalier had entered, alive and free he should leave.

But then—Harry MacLegor had made no further promises.

The Cavalier retired late after the night of feasting in the great hall. He threw himself on his bed without undressing, and slept profoundly. Toward dawn a noise awakened him. The noise was a silken rustle; it was the Countess entering. She put her hand on his shoulder, saying:

"Come my tired sleeper. It's time to get up. MacLegor needs you."

"So early? Is there a letter to be copied?"

"No, he wishes you to see some of the estate and the Cursed Castle, the old keep that guards the forts of Cairngorn; you can see it from here, behind the roofs of the hamlet."

A walk in the cool morning air could not but be agreeable to a soldier like Tancrède; moreover it would drive away the effects of the night's feasting. He made no protest and was ready in a few minutes. Daisy was to accompany her brother and his secretary: all three mounted their horses and started down to the village in the hollow. As they followed the winding path, Tancrède examined with interest the strange appearance of the country he was to inhabit for some time, while the recruiting was carried on.

Behind him on the hill rose the imposing, dominating Kildar Castle, the castle of folly and dreams; at its feet the village. Further off toward the mountains stood the feudal tower so mysteriously called the Cursed Castle, a formidable pile even in its ruined condition. Back of the Cursed Castle arose the mountain, covered with thick verdure; half-way up was a sort of plateau bordered by a wall of almost cyclopean masonry, strengthened by huge timbers. Behind this wall the plateau spread out far and wide, and then with a sudden sweep the granite cliffs rose high in the air.

Tancrède's eyes rested on this unusual landscape; Kildar and the mountain, linked together by the low hills and the remarkable natural depression in which, as Tancrède

thought, the tower and then the village were set like two pebbles in a basin. Daisy was eager to help him understand it all:

"Beautiful, isn't it?"

"It *is* beautiful," replied Tancrède with frank sincerity. "In France we have inspiring scenery, but nothing so remote and wild as this. I suppose this cup-like formation was in earlier days a volcanic cone?"

"On my word," she said maliciously, "that is asking a good deal. I seem to be quite venerable in your eyes, but, really, I wasn't here at the time of which you speak."

The asperity of this response made the Cavalier feel ill at ease; he covered up his feelings by looking closely at the shaky draw-bridge which gave access to the ruins.

"This ruined donjon was formerly a possession of the Duke of Buckingham, I'm told."

"You were correctly informed," said MacLegor with a rather disconcerting smile.

From the old guards' court where they left their horses, they walked through the covered cloisters, and then into the Gothic hall, their steps on the tiled floor awakening mournful echoes in the crumbling and cracked arches. Night-birds flew out with frightened, harsh calls.

"Not a cheerful place," commented Daisy. "Shall we walk out, Cavalier, into the fresh air?"

"Quite right, Daisy. Take him to the upper landing and show him the view—I have something to look over here."

When the sombre MacLegor left them, the spirits of the young people at once rose; they were like carefree children as they climbed the winding stairway, with its broken

steps; they arrived breathless after their scramble and found themselves on the platform of the tower with a wide view spread out before them on every side. The Cavalier sat down, awed by the sight.

"What beauty! Here it would be impossible to have thoughts that were not noble and elevated. Don't you think so? Oh, there can be no doubt of it. What purity is reflected in that sheet of water behind the wall! Is it a reservoir?"

"No, a little lake, and very dangerous. It is called the *Moving Loch.*"

"'Dangerous'? Ah, its name would seem to indicate that. What a strange country in which the names all have significance! Is there a blood-curdling tale connected with this lake?"

"Laugh if you will," said Daisy. She motioned Tancrède to a seat on the crumbling battlement and took a place beside him. "It is exactly as you have suggested."

"Tell me the story; it will make me think of old times and of the wonderful stories the troopers used to tell me when we were in camp."

"Well then," said the Countess, "I'll tell you the story just as my old nurse told it to me.

"In early Gaelic days, when only Erse was spoken, MacAllan was the most powerful chief of the Highlands and had built here a fortified town, a splendid place, the last vestige of which is this tower on which we are seated. There were two entrances into the tower and these I'll have to describe in some detail.

"This town was called Ayr; in order to shorten the route for the traffic that came up from the south and must cross

the Grampians, MacAllan had conceived the idea of cutting a passage through Cairngorn from north to south. It took two thousand laborers twenty years to complete the work, but once it was in use, the wealth of Ayr increased rapidly. The town was now however not so well protected from attacks on the south, with this great corridor exposing it to the raids of the Lowlanders.

"About this time the fame of Julius Cæsar was at its height, and word of his great victories flew over the world —the fall of Alésia, the submission of the Druids of Armorica; there was a rumor that he had with his legions even reached Britain. The Highlanders quivered with excitement at the news, even the great clan of MacAllan. Highland women and girls were thrilled by stories of the beauty of the young conqueror.

"Irva, the daughter of MacAllan, shared this feeling of intense curiosity about Cæsar. She was a beautiful, passionate girl who had never yet had a lover.

"The crafty MacAllan did not intend to wait until his city was attacked before making sure of his defences. He published at once an edict declaring Ayr in danger: women were placed at the work of throwing up defences in the depressions between the ring of hills that formed a protecting circle around the city; every man in Ayr was put to work on the construction of a gigantic wall of masonry. There above us, you see the wall. A triple bronze gate, opening in the middle, afforded passage for all the water necessary for the needs of Ayr.

"MacAllan alone possessed the key that regulated the opening of this gate which had become not only a guarantee of safety but a menace to the town as well, for the wa-

ters dammed behind it formed a lake which filled the subterranean passage to its ceiling, and so precluded possible invasion."

"What a clever scheme!" exclaimed Tancrède admiringly. "So the Roman legions were stopped, and Ayr was saved?"

"It is true that the Roman legions were obliged to halt before Ayr, for they could not pass the barricade and history tells us that they never entered the Highlands; but the fate of Ayr was, nevertheless, a mournful one. What, indeed, were the Grampians to the conqueror of the Alps? Cæsar did not wish, however, to take his army over the stony trails of the mountain before he had made a careful reconnaissance himself; while thus engaged, chance threw the daughter of the chieftain in his path. Like all the great conquerors, you know, Cæsar was also famous for his conquests over women. Irva fell deeply in love with this unknown stranger whose costume set off his lithe and manly figure. She loved for the first time and did not resist her unknown lover.

"Very cautiously Cæsar had continued his study of the military side of his problem: he now saw that by draining the lake he could clear the tunnel and thus open a way straight into the city. But to do this he must have the key to the bronze gate that controlled the flow of the water. In this, Irva was his tool.

"One night the chieftain's daughter betrayed her whole clan, when, from under the pillow of her sleeping father, she took the key and gave it to her lover, whose military schemes she did not suspect. It was never necessary for the Roman legions to march through the tunnel, for Ayr

had already ceased to exist: the bronze door had been opened wide and the entire loch roared into the valley in the 'cup' of which slept the city of Ayr—everything was destroyed, overwhelmed by the flood.

"So that is why this tower, a last remnant of a once flourishing city, is called the Cursed Castle. And that is why the loch which still exists there as a menace is called the *Moving Loch.* The ancient bronze gate was destroyed and is now replaced by a barrier of oaken beams."

Tancrède had followed the story with absorbed interest.

"Why, that is a new version of the legend of Ys," he remarked. "The Highland chief MacAllan corresponds to the good king Grallon and his daughter Irva is another beautiful Ahès."

The Countess was about to reply, when from the foot of the stairway MacLegor called:

"Come down and see this! I've found the oubliettes!"

Down they went. At the end of a corridor, Harry was leaning over a dark hole that exhaled a damp, musty odor.

"See here," he said to his sister.

Their eyes met in a flash of understanding. The face of the Countess was fiercely malicious as she bent over the dark opening. She stepped back suddenly with a slight scream. She had accidentally dropped her riding-whip down the oubliette!

"Madame," said the Cavalier, "I'll get it for you!"

"No, no, please don't. Let it go. I don't need it. It would be foolish to go down there."

"How absurd, there is an iron ladder on the side, and anyway it's not deep. It's a cell, just a place of confinement, nothing more."

He was already going down the iron ladder when it occurred to him to glance again at the Countess, whose smile of thanks was perhaps still hovering on her lips.

The sight he beheld nearly stopped the beating of his heart. Two faces leaned over him—whose were they? Not those of his kind lord and his sweet-faced sister! And what meant that peal of hideous laughter that suddenly reverberated through his cell. Why was everything like a bad dream? Were his senses leaving him? Where was the patch of light at the place he had entered? Why was there no light, why had everything become dark?

Good God! had he been shut into this underground cell, this festering pit?

Where *was* that patch of light? It must be somewhere. Perhaps the sky outside was overcast. He climbed up the iron ladder with frantic haste, only to strike his head against the stone lid with such force that he had to cling desperately to the rung of the ladder to keep from falling back. When he could steady himself, he knocked, called. No answer. Then he listened intently and detected two separate footfalls, the ring of a spurred boot, and the light flurry of a woman's heels.

"The sounds are growing fainter," he murmured, sick with dread. "They are leaving. I—am alone—shut in —buried—buried alive. Oh—the cowards! What had I done to them?"

Everything was in a whirl around him, his ears roared, his heart contracted. In that moment the horrible thought came to him that everything in his life—alas! the irony of his Star!—had happened to him not through chance, but had been plotted and executed against him by traitorous

minds. Then with terrible lucidity his fate was shown him: he must remain in an oubliette, from which no one would rescue him, until he died of hunger, thirst, madness; the reason for this fate he did not know; now he would never know. In the agony of his soul, usually so courageous, he fell on his knees amidst the slime of his prison floor and whispered:

"Claire! Cyrano!"

His love, his only love! . . . His loyal friend!

To them both he dedicated his last thoughts, a last prayer of farewell. Then the pestilential air of the place overcame him and he lost consciousness.

AFTER three hours of steady galloping Patrick and Cyrano and their companions saw suddenly before them, at a turn in the road, Kildar Castle. The sight served to spur them on. Cyrano made his plan of action as they raced on without stopping. In order not to give an alarm before they had seen the Cavalier or knew his whereabouts, Cyrano decided that he would go to the castle, guided by Patrick. Aramis, Saint-Amant, and Linières would be left with the horses in a near-by pine wood that commanded a view of the entrance to the castle. Patrick would remain at the door when Cyrano entered the castle and thus be in a position to act as messenger to the reserve forces in the pine-grove in case of need.

The plan was carried out. Cyrano entered Kildar Castle alone. He was ushered in to the Countess of Suttland: To her warm and friendly greetings he made no return. But the Countess was not quite mistress of herself; a recent episode in the Cursed Castle had somewhat shaken her

nerves and, in truth, the unexpected return of this Gascon troubled her.

"Were you not entrusted with a mission by your master?" she queried. "Ought not you and your companions to be already on your way?"

"The devil! We had started, Madame, and on the way met the formidable group of Lord Montague's men, Monsieur d'Artagnan among them—"

"And what happened?"

"Just this: I have come back to get the Cavalier—where is he?"

"How should I know? I am not the boy's keeper—He went out as usual this morning with MacLegor."

"Thank heavens," thought Cyrano, "we are in time."

Then to the annoyance of the lady, he sat down in a comfortable chair and said:

"Countess, I'll wait here for him. It's an agreeable place to linger."

At this moment Harry MacLegor came into the room. Cyrano arose; his face darkened; for a great fear shot through him, and without warning he demanded:

"What have you done with the Cavalier? Where is he?"

Harry was at first thrown off his guard by this attack but he recovered when he saw the man was of his own party.

"How should I know, Monsieur de Bergerac," he said affably. "He is no doubt in his room. I've not seen him today."

The clarion note in Cyrano's voice rang out as he looked fixedly at first the brother, then the sister:

"You haven't seen him today? Then which of you is lying? Which? *Speak!*"

Brutal, breathing hard, determined to tear aside all masks, Cyrano drew his sword with a sweeping gesture and flashed its blue, eagle-like menace before the two culprits.

Harry took a step toward the window to call for help.

"*Mordious!* Do you think you can trifle with me? Not a step, not a word, or believe me, I'll pin you to the wall like a moth."

The Countess of Suttland dared to banter:

"And will you kill me too?"

"Yes, you too—I demand the Cavalier. You both know where he is and you will tell me. Above all, no lies, for mark me well, for one drop of his blood you will pay with the last drop in your hearts."

Harry's mind was working rapidly: he saw that if he let the Gascon talk and rage, precious time would be gained. He had just given explicit orders to his men and he could perhaps keep this madman at bay until the orders had been carried out.

"Ah," he said craftily, "this is the reward of my hospitality. Insults are poured on me—Monsieur de Bergerac, you are not polite."

"Oh, none of your slimy tricks. Will you speak, you vipers? Where is my Cavalier? You would like to murder him, wouldn't you, because he is Buckingham's son?—Ah—you shake and you beg each other to be silent—but in spite of yourselves, you cowards, you shall speak.

"Patrick—this way!"

The door opened, the rough figure and worn face of the Irishman appeared. Then the two murderers knew

that the game was up and each revealed the hideous traits of his personality. MacLegor stood petrified, but the Countess moved forward passionately and spoke the hatred in her heart:

"Ah, you are looking for your Cavalier—he is lost; nothing can save him. And I will let you know that I, I alone, have put him where his bones will rot! If I wished his death, it was not so much that he was Buckingham's son as that he had offered me mortal insult."

If MacLegor remained quiet it was because, as we have said, he had given certain orders and was awaiting the result.

What were these orders? That burning torches should be flung into the four corners of the forest that enveloped the Cursed Castle and made an impenetrable thicket around it.

And now clouds of smoke were rolling from the forest, flames pierced through, driven by the wind, and with the fierce heat, as of a hundred furnaces, the conflagration gained headway.

At this moment Cyrano, beside himself, rushed at Daisy, to force her to speak; MacLegor moved quickly to the window and opened it.

"Monsieur de Bergerac," he said scornfully as he pointed to the tower whose black mass stood out, lit by the advancing flames, "Monsieur de Bergerac, may I indicate to you just where your Cavalier is now? And will you thank me, bully, for providing you with an adversary worthy of you—and even of a phœnix—*fire.*"

Before MacLegor had finished Cyrano and Patrick had rushed out of doors; the sarcasm was lost on them.

CHAPTER XXI

THE FIERY DUNGEON

WITHOUT a moment's pause, Cyrano and Patrick made straight for the old castle, quite forgetting the group hidden in the pine wood. Both ran like madmen and had all a madman's endurance. But the further they proceeded the more were their eyes blinded by the heat and their ears deafened by the roar of flame and crash of falling trees; their lungs were choked by the black smoke.

The aged Patrick, breathless, almost suffocated and blinded, at last had to turn his back to the flames.

"Forward! Come on!"

Could anything withstand the force and energy of Cyrano? One moment the passing of a thick, deadly cloud of smoke would halt him, then he would start again in the direction of the tower. Tongues of flame were now licking its walls.

Cornebiou! If you must carry a furnace by assault, you must—. The smoke grew heavier, Cyrano's tongue was swollen, his throat parched; he drew his cloak over his head.

"Forward!"

Oh, *mildious!* What a hell! On he went. He could

not now go directly forward, but must take a zig-zag course to escape here a heap of embers, there a falling tree which sent a sheet of flame upward; he did not seem after all this effort to be nearer his goal. Still inaccessible, the tower, dark and gloomy, rose starkly aloft in the centre of the devouring flames. It even seemed to defy them with profound indifference.

Cyrano's hair was scorched, his clothing singed, his flesh blistered, and still the rampart of fire held him back. That alone could stop him.

Furthermore he realized that his death would not bring aid to the Cavalier, nor could it comfort him. Cyrano turned back.

Curses on the flames. He was beaten, *beaten, he Cyrano.* So he had found his master—a deaf, pitiless master! In his retreat he found Patrick; the old man was praying silently, his hands clasped. But Cyrano, crying out in his pain and anger, could only run back and forth like a wounded animal, a madman.

THE Cavalier lost consciousness for only a brief time. At first, awaking in complete darkness, he wondered where he was—all too soon, memory with a rush, reminded him —a dungeon!

Then the strong instinct to live, rooted in the human heart, the passion of youth against imprisonment swept over him and he arose and studied his surroundings, tapping and feeling the walls, ready to follow up any chance.

He was not sure but that he detected a faint light in the depths of one corner. He went in that direction, brushing his shoulders against the slimy walls and alarming a colony

of rats that took flight through a drain near the dim light. The poor boy saw the light and hope awoke in his heart. The light came from the bottom of an opening in the tower and into it ran the drain. But far from being open, this exit was closed with iron bars and bristled with sharp spikes.

For a moment, Tancrède attacked the iron bars with his hands, but it was useless; the ends were firmly imbedded and the rust of centuries had not weakened the thick bars. The stark horror of his plight confronted him: he was to die, then, of slow starvation, wallowing in filth; he would become the prey of rodents which, as his strength failed him, would perhaps attack him alive!

Heavy hours that seemed to seal his doom passed over him. How could he escape from a place known only to his murderers? Hope left him. But it is a paradox that when hope dies, there is a fragile, impalpable something, that clings even to black despair. Tancrède was thinking of Cyrano—he had saved him before—could he perhaps once again?

He reckoned the time that would elapse before he died of starvation—so many days—and by conserving his strength, perhaps a few hours longer. Well—who could tell, from now until then—yes—if he could hold out, perhaps Cyrano could perform a miracle and find him—.

But that noise!—What is it?—a crackling and a roaring that increase in volume. To a man condemned everything has a meaning. Good or evil, which was it? Did it mean deliverance—or the end? He must know—he stood up, questioning, fearful. He thought of the grill! Perhaps he could see through that. He plunged through the filth and once more reached it; he pressed his face against

the bars. What was it? A flight of birds, screaming, flew by darkening the sky; then a thick black cloud passed —what was that smell? Again he heard the deep roar, pierced by sharper, crackling notes. The cloud is pink—now it is turning into dark red—the smell is pungent. Columns of thick, black cloud ascend now, the wind puffs them, and they rush into the conduit. The smell was unmistakable; the Cavalier fell back with a great cry. It was the smell of pitch burning.

"Oh, the cowards!"

Now, he knew. The pine forest above him was on fire, around him the undergrowth was burning, from now on he was cut off from the living by a ring of flame. Certainly the fire had been lighted for him—he could be sure of it.

So he was not to die of starvation; the old donjon of Buckingham had been transformed into a furnace and in it he was to suffer the most horrible of deaths. In his anguish he shrieked aloud:

"Help! Help!"

There was no answer. The smoke entered in puffs; he was choked by it and ceased to shriek. Broken with the accumulation of horrors, the Cavalier's mind reeled and he felt his will give way. He let himself slide to the floor of his tomb. "Claire!" he murmured.

PATRICK wept for his young lord, his child, this time lost forever. Near the broken-hearted old man, came and went de Bergerac, the wounded animal, fierce with rage. Heedless of them, driven by the wind, the fire gained headway until it was beyond human control; it continued to advance in the direction of the Cursed Castle.

"Is there no force with which to fight fire?—Oh! *Capédédious*, it is not just!"

The old Irishman suddenly stood up, brushing away his tears:

"God is just. He has spoken to me—there *is* a force with which to fight fire—we will loose it. Come!"

Cyrano was swept along by the old man's evident inspiration and hastened to follow him. They went up steep paths along the mountain side, circling great distances to escape the fire. From time to time the magnificent, terrifying, superb spectacle of the conflagration appeared beneath them; they saw the keep of the Cursed Castle surrounded by a sea of billowing smoke. The old tower whose walls were licked by flames resembled some proud victim defying his executioner. They continued their ascent, following a path that only their feverish exaltation made possible for them. The air became fresher as they reached the plateau; the Gascon was amazed to see before him the rippling waters of a large lake, well known to Patrick, whose retaining dike, he said, was equalled only by the ramparts of Babylon—the *Moving Loch*.

The name meant nothing to the ex-cadet of the company of Carbon de Casteljaloux, and the footing on the path which edged the wall was dangerous enough to take all his attention. At the feet of the two climbers, straight down, was a sea of fire; further off the peaceful village seemed quiet and deserted for at that hour the whole population, women as well as men, were off on the farm lands which they cultivated.

CHAPTER XXII

THE PHANTOMS

"STOP!" commanded Patrick, seizing the arm of the swordsman, who, intent on the fire, had not noticed that they had reached a break in the dike of more than a hundred feet. The space was strengthened by a dam of huge stones held in place by massive planks.

This dam, perhaps, was the same one which, in other days, had boasted the bronze gate opened by Julius Cæsar with the key that the beautiful and amorous Irva had stolen from the Laird MacAllan.

Seeing the dam, Cyrano at once understood by what means Patrick, invincible in his love, planned to open a road to the donjon where his young lord was imprisoned. They could not pass through fire—but through water they might.

To the task! The two men hurled themselves against the dam, trying to remove or at least loosen the centre beam on which, like the keel of a ship, the entire structure depended. The pent-up water, once finding the slightest outlet, would sweep away beams, joints, stones, finally the whole dam. Armed with a huge bar of iron which served both as a sledge-hammer and crow-bar, Cyrano struck blow after blow. The structure began to weaken.

A far-away noise came to his ear as he worked and he paused for a moment.

"*Cornebiou!*" he muttered. "Is it the tocsin?"

Yes, it was the alarm sounding from the village in the hollow, and carrying its sinister message far and wide. A confused murmur could be heard from below. Shading his eyes with his hand, Cyrano peered at the crowd gathering in the cup-shaped valley far beneath. He then surveyed the range of mountains that would make this valley a horrible death-trap if once the waters should be released.

He drew back, nauseated. What price would they pay if the roaring torrent first must sweep its way over the valley before reaching the Cursed Castle? Alas, they had no right to do this to save one man, no matter how precious his life! It would mean ruin, devastation, death for scores of innocent persons!

"Come, continue!" said Patrick, who was not embarrassed by any such reflections.

"No, I cannot! We have no right to do so monstrous a thing!"

"Monstrous?" repeated the Irishman, unable to understand his companion's meaning. "Monstrous, to save the little one? The Cavalier first, Monsieur de Bergerac! What difference do the others make?"

"No, there is only one hand that might perhaps commit this terrible act without appearing in the eyes of God a criminal."

"Whose?"

"That of a mother saving her child!"

"Ha, the mother! Who is she? What is *she* doing? At the fatal hour of danger, her son, the child of her womb,

is far away from her, and without ever having known her, is suffering his supreme agony!

"Well, since a mother's hand is missing, a father's will accomplish the task! Yes, a father's! He is mine, that orphan—my little lord, my beloved son! The child of my heart, even if not of my blood! Yes, if a mother's love is absent, a father's love will make up for it! And here I am! On with the task! Let the entire world perish so that he live! He must live, I say! God alone can judge!"

With savage fury, armed with a strength of which he seemed incapable, the old man continued to struggle with the beams. Not daring to interfere, Cyrano turned his eyes away in horror. From the basin below, the sound of alarmed cries kept mounting.

Patrick was accomplishing his work without weakening. A task of salvation and of death. He no longer heard anything. He did not wish to hear. But suddenly from the confused hubbub below, came a cry, a piercing cry, the cry that can be recognized among a thousand—that of a frightened child.

A cold sweat broke out on the old Irishman's face. Leaving the dam at the very moment when it was about to give way, he returned to the dike. Falling on his knees, he murmured bitterly:

"Oh, forgive me, my little master! God does not will this."

The faithful old man wept piteously. He no longer paid any attention to the fire, which was now encircling the donjon with redoubled fierceness. One tall pine tree after another burst into flames, only to crash later with a sickening noise into the raging furnace.

The minutes passed with terrible slowness. Cyrano stood always by the side of his poor, broken-hearted companion. He made no attempt to help him with vain words of consolation. Our Gascon was accustomed to human suffering and knew that certain forms of it could only be assuaged by the passing of time. And how could he in the agony of witnessing this slow death bring consolation to another!

"*Cornebiou*, who's coming?"

Cyrano thought he heard foot-steps on the dike. Was it Aramis, Saint-Amant, Linières? Impossible! His loyal friends had no idea of his whereabouts. Could it be their enemies? Alas, what difference now!

He turned around. Was he dreaming? Had his mind given way? Could those figures still half hidden in the smoke be human? The first two had human shape, the third the form of some animal. Three shadows, three phantoms!

Indeed, the weird appearance of these three spectres was enough to terrify the Gascon after his horrible eternity of suffering—although it had been scarcely a half hour since he left Kildar! He was convinced that for the first time in his life he was face to face with ghosts. He had never met, and therefore could not possibly recognize, Angus MacDiarmid, his senile chaplain, and the decrepit collie. But Patrick who had just raised his head did not hesitate for a second.

"MacDiarmid!" he shouted with a fierce cry of hatred. "Judas! Traitor! Ah, Monsieur de Bergerac, heaven has sent at least one of them to us! He must pay for them all!"

The old Laird, dressed in a white cape, thin and flowing, advanced between his two feeble companions with measured tread and vacant eyes. The chaplain was still armed with his rat-dagger—"Strike, George!"; the slowly moving dog seemed nothing but a skeleton.

Cyrano, suddenly understanding, stopped Patrick with his powerful hand as the Irishman was about to spring.

"An old man," he said. "Already half dead!"

"The assassin!"

"He is being led by repentance! Let him go to his fate!"

The phantoms had passed, brushing against them without seeing them. Angus stopped a few yards away from them at the centre of the dam. What did he intend to do? The beams trembled beneath his feet—he paid no attention to them. His haggard eyes moved slowly from the fire to the narrow fissures through which the water was already beginning to escape. He raised his emaciated arms to heaven; the pale lips trembled slightly as if he were murmuring a prayer—a final offering before the holocaust. The chaplain intoned a doleful *miserere*, while the dog uttered a last, mournful howl before death!

Suddenly there was a terrific crash. The ancient dike shook beneath the feet of Cyrano and Patrick. The waters rushed forth, victorious and powerful, after their centuries of confinement. The first impact had carried away the dam where once had stood the famous bronze gate.

The miracle had followed the old Laird's prayer. The calm waters had burst their barriers, and starting once again upon their legendary course, swept with uncontrol-

lable fury toward the valley, carrying before them all obstacles: beams, rocks, gates—and phantoms!

Below, the water quickly mounted, fighting step by step against the fire, inundating the burning slopes of the mountains, washing against the stones of the doomed castle. Thick clouds of smoke were joined in their ascent toward the skies with vast volumes of steamy vapor—a sign of this gigantic struggle between two elements.

Cyrano at last recovering from his hopeless despair cried:

"A boat! Oh God, a boat!"

"I know where to find one," said Patrick, drawing him away. "Come!"

A SMALL skiff bore two men toward the donjon. The whirling water at times covered the tops of the tall pines that had been spared by the fire. Smouldering logs like strange floating islands passed by.

Reaching their goal the men jumped into the water, which was waist deep, scrambled up the slope, crossed the draw-bridge, and raced frantically through the dark rooms calling aloud with all their power.

No answer, nothing but echoes. Twenty times the desperate rescuers passed by the opening which separated them from the youth they sought. But who could tell them where he was? The Cavalier, half-fainting and realizing that it was useless to struggle longer against a sure death, had fallen into an exhausted sleep. He had said his last farewell to the world of the living to which he would never return.

Tired of the fruitless search and tormented by Cyrano's cries of despair, the old Irishman left the castle and de-

scended to the moats, always looking for some trace. His attention was attracted to a hole pierced in the wall just above the level of the water. He leaned over and saw a dark passage protected by a heavy iron grating. A smell of rank mouldiness came from within.

"Monsieur de Bergerac," he called. "Come and help me! The oubliettes!"

Cyrano rushed to him, and placing his muscular hands upon the bars, pulled with all his strength, once, twice, three times.

"Alas," he sighed, still tugging in vain at the immovable grating, "if only Saint-Amant were here!"

Luckily, Patrick, though less powerful, had more patience. With the help of his dagger, he worked furiously on the joints. Finally Cyrano was able to break down the grating. He at once slipped into the narrow hole, thankful at having his own rather than Saint-Amant's bulk.

He advanced directly along the foul drain seeing nothing. The Irishman remained outside trembling.

"Is he there? Is he alive? Speak, for heaven's sake, Monsieur de Bergerac!"

Cyrano did not answer. Interminable minutes passed. Finally a body slowly began to appear at the opening. First came the feet, then the torso, and finally the head—a youthful, pale, handsome head! The faithful Patrick recognized the features of his master, Lord Buckingham!

Then with unbelievable strength the old man lifted the lifeless body in his arms and rushed off, crying wildly:

"My lord! My little lord! My child!"

"Hmm," grunted the Gascon joyously as he squirmed out

of the hole, "this is my reward. The old fellow has forgotten that I'm alive!"

He followed Patrick up the slope and joined him at the moment he was placing the precious burden in the bottom of the boat. They were soon rowing vigorously toward the hill behind Kildar. In the distance Aramis, Saint-Amant, and Linières, amazed to see them approach in such an unexpected vehicle, waited for them on the shore of the newly-formed lake.

During their swift advance the rescuers had to make a quick turn to avoid a strange floating mass. First came an animal; yes, a dead dog. Then an old man, the chaplain of the castle, likewise dead. And finally a second old man—dead like the others. It was now almost dark. The silvery light of the moon shone on the white hair of the old Laird. His face at last seemed calm and happy.

"The three phantoms!"

Patrick stood up and crossed himself.

"Yes, Lord Angus MacDiarmid and his two followers," he said. "To expiate his sin, he has had to sacrifice his life and go to eternal damnation!"

"No," murmured Cyrano bowing his head solemnly, "he has won forgiveness."

CHAPTER XXIII

LOVE CONQUERS

We left d'Artagnan in the Highland cottage, near the Chasm of Death, which might have been his grave except for Cyrano de Bergerac's superhuman courage. At first he took little notice of the departure of his friends who had gone to the rescue of the Cavalier. As soon as they had left he fell into a fitful sleep. His body was weak and broken and the former surgeon's assistant gave him only broth, to guard against the fever.

When he awoke the next morning he already felt better. No bones, fortunately, had been broken. But he was still so shaken by the impact of his terrific fall over the precipice that he played the part of a docile invalid for the next two days. By the morning of the third day, however, he felt fully recovered, and in spite of his kind host's protests, went out to take the air.

He was beginning to be a bit anxious at not having received word from his friends. Seating himself on the little plateau that overlooked the path he waited patiently for news. He had been there about an hour when a peasant came to tell him that a horseman had arrived by a circuitous route and insisted on seeing him at once.

"Bazin, at last!" cried the Musketeer, when Aramis's faithful servant approached. "Ye Gods, how I have waited for you! But, *cadédis*, have you come alone?"

Apparently the sacristan gave a satisfactory answer for the Musketeer was pressing his hand warmly when a group of cavaliers suddenly appeared down the path and advanced to the plateau. In front rode a man in the prime of life, of handsome, aristocratic bearing. The nobleman jumped from his horse and walked with open arms toward the soldier who had so recently escaped from death.

"Lord Montague, I have never for a moment doubted that you would come."

"And do you know me so well then?" asked the nobleman, smiling.

"Yes, very well!"

"And for how long?"

"For seventeen years . . . do you remember, my lord, the gardens at Amiens? . . . I was there!"

Montague quickly suppressed the shudder that this distant memory had at once produced.

"You are right, Monsieur le Comte. I, too, never doubted you."

He then sat down next d'Artagnan on the bench and in a friendly manner began to tell him what had happened since he had last been in touch with events. Many obscure points that the soldier had never understood were now cleared up. The temporary hermit of the Grampians learned how all of Vauselle's machinations had been discovered and how the scoundrel had fled just in time to save himself. Lord Montague, without waiting for fur-

ther developments, had then rushed off to the rescue of his protégé, the little Cavalier, who had been completely freed of all the calumnious charges against him.

D'Artagnan listened to the recital without any sign of surprise. He was not the person to be astonished by a change in fortune, no matter how unexpected or agreeable. Yet one thing puzzled him: he and Aramis, keeping to their solemn vows, had not said a word about their respective secrets. Who then could have unravelled so easily this most complicated tangle?

"Who can tell me how this all happened?" he murmured thoughtfully, not realizing that his voice could be heard by others.

"'Who can tell'? I! 'And how'? I likewise," replied a soft, laughing voice.

The troop of horsemen opened and disclosed a person who had hitherto remained in the background. It was Claire de Cernay, divinely beautiful in her boyish riding costume; Claire, the sly worker of this mysterious transformation. Quickly advancing toward the Musketeer she threw herself into his arms.

"Dear friend," she said, lifting her face for his kiss, "you do not know how wonderful it has been to feel that you were always near Tancrède. And I must thank you particularly for the message from the Duchess that you and Monsieur Aramis had Bazin bring to me—*'Come at once'!*"

She then explained how she had had an immediate presentiment of danger, and had gone in tears to the Queen. Anne herself was alarmed by the mysterious message and

had ordered her favorite to put aside everything and rush to London as soon as possible. She and Bazin travelled night and day. In London she had gone at once to Lord Montague and Madame de Chevreuse, and as a result of her determined insistence, they at last understood that they had been victims of an odious conspiracy against the Cavalier.

While listening to her d'Artagnan felt strangely moved.

"The girl is a jewel," he thought. "Oh, foolish old soldier, why didn't you pick up an equally priceless object in the days of old!"

"My child," said Montague, pressing Claire to his bosom with paternal fondness, "we are proud of your courage. Why don't you stay with us and help the Cavaliers defeat the Roundheads?"

Montague then turned to more serious matters. They must waste no time, he thought, in rushing to the help of the young man of whom they had had no news. The nobleman was at the head of a splendid troop of the King's Cavaliers—those brave soldiers who had held the Puritans in check for so long a time. With such a force he had nothing to fear, even if it were necessary to lay siege to the outlawed conspirator's castle.

"Come, away!" he said. "To horse, gentlemen!"

But he had scarcely given this command when the sound of shots was heard from the other side of the hut.

"*Jarni!*" cried d'Artagnan, straightening up. "The smell of powder has made a new man of me! There's fighting going on in the Chasm of Death!"

The sounds of conflict came nearer. Montague and his followers waited breathlessly. Yes, it was a cavalcade of Scotch warriors. But instead of attacking Montague's

troop—of whose presence they could have no suspicion—they were rushing upon a little group of five or six horsemen. Opposite the hut these horsemen had suddenly turned and directed a devastating fire at their pursuers.

"Monsieur d'Herblay!" shouted Lord Montague, recognizing Aramis.

"Patrick! . . . Monsieur de Bergerac and his friends!" cried d'Artagnan.

Everyone had the same thought.

The Cavalier? . . . Was the Cavalier with them?

All eyes tried in vain to identify the last figure in the group. But there was no time. The fight had already begun.

"Advance, men!" commanded the noble lord, leading his Cavaliers to the attack.

The troop advanced with Bazin and Claire, who had quickly remounted, in their midst, and joined in the charge. D'Artagnan alone remained behind. The astonished Presbyterians found themselves attacked on the flank as well as in front. A heavy cloud of dust hung over the scene. The Scotch, who had been taken off their guard, quickly collected together in a solid phalanx. But a sudden attack on their rear, which they had considered secure, caused the cry of retreat to be sounded. The rout became general and those who dared to hesitate were forced into the chasm below.

D'Artagnan from his point of vantage had watched the struggle with breathless interest. He now saw the victorious Cavaliers return. At their head rode two persons whose sex it was difficult to distinguish, as they both had light, curly hair and youthful faces. One he recognized

at once—Claire! The other? . . . Zounds, it was Tancrède!

But what was Lord Montague doing? Instead of dismounting he had ranged his followers, still panting from the battle, into two lines. At a signal from him the soldiers drew their swords and crossed them, thus forming a sparkling arch under which Tancrède and Claire, so preoccupied in each other that they had noticed nothing, slowly passed. The soldiers of the King raised a resounding "Hip-hip-hurrah!"

"The arch of steel!" murmured d'Artagnan, more touched than he cared to admit. "It is a compliment the English pay only to victorious generals or to a soldier and his bride!"

A few moments later d'Artagnan, Aramis, Cyrano, and Patrick were joined in a happy reunion. The Musketeer listened with astonishment and enthusiasm to the tale of the events at Kildar, the providential bursting of the dam, and the unbelievable miracle of the Cavalier's rescue.

He heard how Cyrano and Patrick, after bringing the unconscious youth to the bank of the lake where their friends had waited for them, were furiously attacked by the clan of MacDiarmid under the leadership of MacLegor and his sister. The Frenchmen and Patrick considered their position desperate. They were too few in number to resist the Highland troops who were slowly pushing them into the lake.

Then Saint-Amant, suddenly seizing the Cavalier with a powerful hand, and placing him cross-wise over his saddle, had started off at a gallop. His companions followed him. The Puritans gave chase and kept close to them

throughout the retreat; but no harm had been done. Finally, thanks to the intervention of the Cavaliers, the pursuers had been defeated.

D'Artagnan learned the last part of this thrilling story as he trotted along by the side of Cyrano, who often gave him a sustaining hand, since he was still weak. Lord Montague, always wise and cautious, and fearing a new attack, had ordered a retreat. He had decided it would not be safe to pass the night in these mountain passes.

Toward evening the cavalcade reached the lowlands and pitched their tents. It was still necessary to take every precaution and accordingly they placed signal fires about the camp and detailed a force to act as sentinels.

Later in the evening Lord Montague, d'Artagnan, Aramis, and Patrick held a council in the nobleman's tent. It was not a council of war, this time, but a council of family, or rather, friendly relations. The subject under discussion was the Cavalier's future. The Irishman had kept all the papers entrusted to his care, and it was now their duty to study them carefully. The most important document was that in which the father recognized his son, who had been baptized George-Tancrède, as Viscount Villiers. There were also specific grants of money, with the Laird Angus MacDiarmid as trustee, if alive.

"The property mentioned in these papers," said the Abbé, whose knowledge of law was quite extensive, "is, fortunately, all situated in England."

The young lord, now the legitimate and recognized holder of his title, could probably obtain his property by petitioning the King.

"Yes, it will be quite easy, I think," said Montague.

"I'll tell you why. By his marriage to Claire de Cernay he will become a member of my family!"

For several moments Patrick had not joined in the discussion. He seemed to be alarmed and examined his pockets feverishly. He then looked anxiously through the pile of papers on the table.

"By St. Dunstan," he cried. "A document has disappeared!"

"*Mordi!*" said d'Artagnan, realizing that the Irishman was thoroughly aroused. "Is it an indispensable paper?"

"Indispensable? No, not altogether. But its absence annoys me greatly. It is the link between these different acts. How can it have disappeared? Who could have stolen that last will of my beloved master?"

In his melodious southern voice the Musketeer interrupted:

"The will? Are you disturbed about the will? Well, *sandis*, why didn't you say so sooner?"

He drew from beneath his doublet a somewhat battered parchment which he handed to the astonished Patrick, saying:

"I have been guarding this for a long time. No, don't thank me. It was very kindly supplied to me by Monseigneur Mazarin, our illustrious Secretary of State."

In answer to the flood of questions that greeted this remark, d'Artagnan was forced to recount the entire story of how he had made Monsieur Mazarin believe in devils by the simple expedient of pretending to be asleep and then slipping the precious parchment into his boot.

"D'Artagnan," said Aramis at the end of the story, "you are a far greater casuist than I shall ever be!"

While this scene was taking place in Montague's tent, Cyrano was seated in front of a little fire near the outpost of the camp. It was obvious at the first glance that he was disturbed. The reason for this was that he had not seen Saint-Amant or Linières since the fight. And yet he was certain that they hadn't fallen into the chasm or remained in the camp. Indeed he was almost positive that he had seen them at the close of the battle.

"Where can they be?" he kept asking himself. "Perhaps they are merely late in returning to the camp after the sounding of taps. Oh, they're hopeless as soldiers!"

There could be no question that the two men both had the roving spirit. Late in the night they returned. Between them was a person tied up in a most thoroughgoing manner.

"Who is that man?" asked Cyrano.

The two conspirators did not answer, but mysteriously deposited their prisoner in a tent, leaving him to the care of two sentinels. At last Saint-Amant spoke:

"Savinien, my son, your indiscretion fairly breaks my heart. We played truant in order to get some fruit . . . we were successful and brought it back with us. Don't try to taste it; it is our share of the prize."

The stars were shining brilliantly and a fresh coolness rose from the earth. The Cavaliers slept soundly during these early hours of the morning. Only the bivouac fires continued to send up their flame.

One side of the camp adjoined the forest. It was there that the tents of the mysterious prisoner and of Patrick, Cyrano, and his companions had been pitched. All was silence, except for occasional heavy snoring!

Could that be the breeze, that low, strange noise? No, the air was still. And yet a faint sound as of someone creeping, could be heard. It was so faint that the weary sentinels noticed nothing. But there was one person who did not sleep and who listened alertly for the slightest sound.

Since he had recovered his young master, Patrick now lived only to avenge him. He kept pondering how to take this vengeance upon those cruel monsters who had made both of them suffer so terribly. For that reason alone he had not slept. He must watch always! Instinctively he had guessed the name of the prisoner in the adjoining tent. Without having seen him, *he knew that it was he!*

Attracted by the noise, the Irishman discarded the plaid which had served him as a bed covering. The sound could still be heard. He stepped outside the tent.

No, he had not been deceived! A large shadow was slowly emerging from beneath the flap of the next tent. The shadow was that of a man whose shoulders were bound by fetters, but who had the use of his arms and legs. He was advancing cautiously with a slow creeping movement.

Patrick followed him silently. He must face alone this man whom God had delivered to him. The afternoon before Harry MacLegor had led the retreat of the Roundheads. He was some distance ahead when the marauding Saint-Amant and Linières had surprised him before he could call for help. It had been the work of seconds only to gag, bind and abduct him. But now, profiting by the sentinels' sleep, he was slowly gaining his freedom.

He finally reached the edge of the forest and stood up,

ready to plunge into the heavy undergrowth where pursuit would be impossible. But he was unable to move. A hand was on his shoulder. Curses! Was he to be stopped just as he was on the point of escaping? Would the dagger concealed beneath his coat be sufficient protection?

He turned around. Oh, God be praised! It was only the ancient Patrick! The two men silently clutched at each other and the struggle began. It was a ghastly, hideous combat. Hands and feet were the only weapons. Patrick was unarmed and Harry had not had time to reach for his dagger. Hate was the powerful motive that sustained them. Without uttering a word the combatants seized each other, each trying to break his opponent's bones or strangle him. They rolled over and over on the ground, head beat against head, and teeth bit into the flesh until the blood appeared. It was savage, primeval.

Suddenly the alarm was given in the camp by the shot from a sentry's gun. Torches were hastily lighted and the Cavaliers rushed from their tents. The light of the torches fell upon a horrible spectacle. Two men held each other in a death grip; the bleeding bodies were practically without clothing. One was motionless; the other gasped for breath. Patrick, still alive but bleeding profusely at the mouth, was lifted up.

"He wished to escape! . . . God gave him to me! . . . I seized him!"

The Cavalier held him in his arms, pressing him to his heart.

"Wounded! You are wounded!" he murmured, feeling the warm blood pour over his hands.

"Wounded, but avenged!" cried the old man, snatching

from his breast the dagger which MacLegor had sunk to its hilt.

Blood gushed forth from the open wound. Life was slipping quickly from the aged frame. The tears flowed freely from Tancrède's eyes.

"Patrick, my friend, my saviour, my second father!"

"My dear little lord, my child! . . . Ah, I die happy!"

Withdrawing his eyes from the young Cavalier, the Irishman stared with an expression of ferocious joy at the inanimate body of his enemy. Then he looked toward heaven. His face became relaxed, and he seemed to be smiling as he whispered:

"My lord Duke, my Master, we have obtained justice! . . . Your servant has kept his word!"

And he fell dead across the corpse of MacLegor whom he had strangled with his own aged hands.

Some time later aristocratic London society flocked in great numbers to witness the marriage of George-Tancrède, Viscount Villiers, and Claire Anne-Marie de Cernay. The English aristocracy present were surprised to discover that attendant at this great wedding, and the most honored of the guests, were four almost unknown Frenchmen: Messieurs Cyrano de Bergerac, Saint-Amant, d'Artagnan, and d'Herblay.

If the truth had been known, a fifth Frenchman was to have been present. But, alas, Linières had gone early on this happy day to a little tavern opposite the church, and by the time the ceremony had begun, he was sleeping peacefully on a bench with an empty bottle of wine clutched firmly in his right hand.

THE END

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